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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

GIANTS AMONG US: A STUDY OF FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE GRADUATES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

SANDRIA D. RODRIGUEZ

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY 1998

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The number of people who gave me invaluable help with this study is staggering.

Friends, colleagues, family, acquaintances, strangers -- their contributions made the development and completion of my work possible. I thank them all.

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As for my family -- my parents, my husband and daughter, my brother and sisters, my nieces and nephews -- their love, strength, and encouragement never faltered. They never grew tired, and I am grateful.

DEDICATION

To my Mother and Father

Rosetta Williams

and

Burnett Williams

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sometime after midnight on a star lit evening in the autumn of 1931, my mother and her siblings were awakened by loud knocks on the front door of their house, the snorting of horses, and the shouts of white men demanding that my grandfather come out. Holding a lamp before her like Lady Liberty's flame, my grandmother opened the door and told the men, who were not hooded, that my grandfather was not there. "My churren are sleeping," she told them. "Please don't wake them up." Two of the men came in and looked around the three room house. They carried lanterns which shone upon my mother and her sisters in one bed and her brothers in the other. They looked under the beds, in the kitchen; there was no place to hide inside the house. And my grandfather, warned by a sympathetic white man an hour earlier of his impending lynching, had flown into the night, mysteriously lifted, as it seemed, above woods, swamp, and river never to contact his wife or children again.

The weather turned cold early that year. There was deep snow. My grandmother had work cooking for teachers at the white people's school. She

would wrap burlap sacks -- or inner tubes from car tires when she could get them -- around her feet as protection against the snowdrifts covering the fields and pathways to and from work. My mother missed almost the whole year of school because she had no shoes. She never got beyond fifth grade, and though she could read children's stories and the Bible, she was functionally illiterate. Yet, she had an unquenchable love and respect for education. As a mother she imparted that love of learning to her five children, all of whom went to college.

My sisters, brother, and I are college educated members of the middle class basically because of my parents' great desire that we make a better living for ourselves than they had been able to do. They made tremendous personal sacrifices to ensure our future. I remember that my mother wore the same coat for ten winters when I was growing up. She would go north to the city during the four months after Christmas to work as a live-in maid for rich white people in order to help my father pay college tuition. From the vantage point of our own comfortable stations in life, my siblings and I see clearly that our mother's sacrifices on our behalf, along with those of our father, were nothing short of phenomenal.

Interestingly enough, within the context of her familial background, my mother's aspirations that her children become college educated was an exhibition of deviant behavior. Her own education had not been encouraged, and none of her siblings had urged their children to aspire to earn a college

degree. In fact, some of her nieces and nephews did not complete high school. Even as a child I wondered admiringly how my mother could be so vastly different from other members of her family. As an adult my thoughts more often have turned to what my mother could have become if her opportunities had been different.

My parents were giants upon whose shoulders my siblings and I stand. Our children stand there too, as will their children. My mother was an agent of total change in her ancestral line. She left the long worn rails of recent generations and imagined a new way over unfamiliar land. She "switched the track," and her children took off in a different direction. Her grandchildren are now on the course which she set so many years ago. Her eldest grandchild attended Illinois State University and North Central College. One of her granddaughters earned a bachelor's degree in three years with honors from Harvard University and recently graduated from medical school at Columbia University's School of Physicians and Surgeons. Another granddaughter is in her senior year of undergraduate school at Johns Hopkins University. Yet another granddaughter recently graduated from Columbia College with a bachelor's degree, and a grandson is in his sophomore year at Temple University. The youngest grandchild, a high school senior, has compiled a list of colleges that he would like to attend. My family's bright present and future are the result of unflagging sacrifice and beloved intention. My mother and father lifted their descendants by

design into an entirely different socioeconomic class. None of us shows any indication of deviating downward from what for us has become the familial norm.

While growing up black, female, poor, southern, without strong family support, and during the Great Depression effectively ensured that my mother would not become college educated, those conditions did not prevent her from enhancing the educational levels and lifestyle of her children. Many others of my generation were not so lucky in that no one in their families "switched the track" on their behalf. Yet, possessing what very well may be the same determination and drive which compelled my mother, and being born almost three or more decades later than she was, some extraordinary individuals have been able to rise above formidable obstacles to complete a college degree, the first in the histories of their families to do so. By "switching the track" for themselves, these remarkable people have undoubtedly affected the upward mobility -- educationally, socially, and economically -- of their descendants for generations to come. In addition, they almost certainly have influenced others along the way to become agents of positive change in their own lives and in the lives of their progeny by becoming first-generation college graduates.

Background to the Study

Since first-generation college students' short and long range effects upon society appear to be dramatically significant, it seems surprising that so little data have been collected about them. For instance, no one knows how many students who have attended or are

currently enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States are first-generation college students, just as no one can say how many of the nation's college graduates have been the first in their families to earn a college degree. As Padron (1992), London (1986), and others have pointed out, most colleges and universities in the United States have not amassed the necessary data to determine the numbers or identities of their students who are first-generation college attendees.¹ Consequently, this lack of information makes institutions ill-

¹ Padron (1992) wisely cautions that in an effort to estimate the number of first generation college students on a campus, student demographics cannot be viewed as proportionally reflective of the service community. He contends, however, that the demographic profile of students and community may be predictive of the number of first generation college students enrolled at a particular campus. His case in point is the Wolfson campus at Miami-Dade Community College where 65 percent of the students are native speakers of forty-two different languages other than English and hail from 120 different countries. Seventy-one percent of the students have jobs, and 18 percent work more than forty hours per week. Over 60 percent of the students are need-based financial aid recipients, and 67 percent of entering freshmen are deficient in basic skills. Students who are twenty-six years old and over comprise 35.2 percent of the student body. Only 28 percent of whites in the Wolfson campus service community, 11.3 percent of blacks, and 11 percent of Hispanics have earned college degrees. Moreover, even though college educated parents in the area are prone to send their children to college immediately following high school graduation, their tendency is to send their children to four-year colleges and universities. Padron uses this profile of college and community, along with reports from faculty and administrators at Wolfson, to conclude that a large majority of their 10,000 students are among the first generation in their families ever to attend college.

While Padron's inferential method of determining the proportion of first generation students at a college may seem insubstantive, especially when applied to less heterogeneous student bodies, more conclusive practices by which colleges assess their numbers of first generation students are not readily apparent in the literature. For instance, the 1995 almanac issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a virtual fount of information about higher learning, is silent on the subject of first generation college students. Yet, in its data on community colleges, the almanac states that in the nine years between 1984 and 1993, enrollments in two year colleges increased by 1,038,000 students, from 4,528,000 in 1984 to 5,566,000 in 1993. This represents a 22.9 percent increase in enrollment at the two-year college level, as compared to a 13.4 percent increase at the four-year college level during the same period.

equipped to counter a major barrier to college success -- a student's status as the first in his or her family to attend college (Zwerling & London, 1992). While this barrier has been illuminated in studies during the last decade, far more -- and of far greater breadth and depth -- still needs to be said.

What little is known about first-generation college students includes the fact that they are disproportionately represented in community colleges (Birenbaum, 1986; London, 1992; Rendon, 1994; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Willett, 1989). Perhaps it is the stigma that is generally attached to community colleges, to their typically working class students, and to most research that focuses on community college concerns which accounts, at least in part, for the fact that first-generation college students have been so seldom studied (LaPaglia, 1995). No matter how devalued community colleges may be in society's estimation, however, first-generation college aspirants see two year institutions as more accessible a gateway to upward mobility than their four-year counterparts (Karabel, 1986). An illustration of this point is provided by LaPaglia (1994), the first in her family to go to college, who explains that she spent her freshman year at the local junior college because she had to find a scholarship to cover tuition, the funds to pay room and board, and the "audacity" to go to the university (p. xiv). LaPaglia's experience appears typical of first-generation students for whom a lack of both money and a sense of belonging heightens the chances that if they go to college at all, they will enroll in a two-year rather than a four-year institution. Rendon (1994) contends that the increase in community college enrollment has been fueled by an influx of immigrants and students of color, people for whom the community college still offers the best chance of attaining an improved social and economic standing in today's world.

With the realization that the community college has become the major point of entry to higher education in many states for the great majority of all college entrants, the need to address aids and barriers to student success at community colleges is imminent (Rendon, 1994). Closely aligned to this address must be the efficacious consideration of first-generation students on the nation's college and university campuses. If the success of first-generation college students is to be enhanced, colleges and universities must not only implement ways of better identifying those students, but they must also come to understand how various family, life, and college experiences (as well as the barriers of culture, class, race, and gender which accompany them) influence and affect the success of such students. Equally important, colleges and universities must come to understand how individuals who are "agents of change" play a significant role in the educational development of first-generation students. These outcomes are prerequisites to identifying and providing what students need in order to achieve the quality of education that is the goal of institutions and students alike. Nothing less is required if the national rhetoric espousing equality of educational opportunity is to be brought into closer alignment with the truth.

Purposes of the Study and Research Questions

The study was about seventeen remarkable men and women who beat the odds by becoming the first in their families to overcome great obstacles to earn a college degree. In particular, the purposes of this study were twofold. First, I was interested in identifying those family, life, and college experiences that contributed to the success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. Second, once these experiences were identified, I was

interested in understanding how they affected students and their decisions to become -- and later serve as -- educational or social activists for others. With these purposes in mind, I drew upon the rich and compelling life histories of these men and women and explored the following three research questions:

1. What family and life experiences contribute to the matriculation and subsequent educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students?
2. What college-specific experiences--both in- and out of-class--contribute to the educational success of low socioeconomic status first generation college students?
3. How do the various experiences previously described affect students? What imprint do these experiences make on students' decisions to become educational or social activists? How do they affect the ways in which these first-generation college graduates live their lives and affect others as agents of change?

Definitions of Terms

1. *First-generation college student:* Several scholars have put forth, implicitly or directly, definitions of first-generation college students. London (1992) and Zwerling (1976) described first-generation college students as having parents and grandparents who typically did not complete high school, never attended college, and earned their livelihoods through blue-collar occupations. Billson and Terry (1982) defined

first-generation college students as those whose parents had not attended college, even though their siblings may have attended. They examined gradations of first- and second-generationality by asking such questions as whether one or both parents had attended but not graduated from college. Their answers enabled them not only to distinguish between first- and second-generation college graduates but also to draw conclusions about the absence as well as the presence of parental college experience upon first- and second-generation college students. York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) defined first-generation college students as those whose parents and or siblings had not attended college at all or who had attended for less than one year. Terenzini et al. (1996) defined first-generation students as those whose parents did not have any college experience. Similarly, for this study I chose to define a first-generation college student as the first person within an immediate or primary family unit to matriculate in college.

2. *Educational or social activist*: Webster 's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines an activist as one whose "doctrine or practice emphasizes direct vigorous action . . . in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" (1986, p.54). In a self-description, the activist, educator, and writer Ruth Sidel stated, "I identify as a teacher, as a social activist, as somebody who looks at the world and wants to make people feel and understand the inequities in our society" (Budhos, 1996, p. 31). In this study, I used the term *educational or social activist* to refer to an individual who advocates for the advancement of his or her views on education or other social issues. For instance, if an educational or social activist is against specific policies and

practices in an educational institution because they marginalize certain groups of students, the activist might analyze those policies and practices, show how they have been veiled in the deceptive rhetoric of sound and equitable education for all students, and reveal their discriminatory and premeditated results -- with the clear objective of bringing about their demise (Fine & Weis, 1993). In this study, educational or social activists focused their energies on any level(s) of formal schooling -- preschool, primary, middle, secondary, college, or graduate -- or upon any social issue. While an educational or social activist does not have to be an educator -- or educated, for that matter -- the activists included in this study qualified at least on the second account.

3. *Successful college student:* A college student who achieves the "overall student educational objectives such as earning a degree, persisting in school, and learning the 'right' things -- the skills and knowledge that will help students to achieve their goals in work and life" is successful (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 15). In this study, the minimum requirement for a successful student was having been able to earn a college degree.

Review of Related Literature

While conducting this study, I imagined myself a privileged traveler. My traveling companions were the extraordinary men and women whose lives I examined here. Also on the journey were the authors whose studies provide a historical perspective on first-generation college students in the United States. Their works informed the content of my study and provided instinctive signposts for its direction. Though few in number, some of these recent

studies suggest that first-generation college students may be beginning to inch inward from the margins of educational awareness and concern toward a more significant position on the American collegiate agenda.

In the following section, I highlight three major strands in the literature on first-generation college students: the transition to college, specific barriers to college success, and potential remedies to the barriers. I conclude with a brief discussion of various shortcomings associated with the literature and an explanation of how they have informed my study.

Transition to College

Howard London was among the first to study first-generation college students in the United States. In his widely cited book, *The Culture of a Community College*, London (1978) explored the various conflicts that working class individuals experience as they make the transition from their blue-collar communities to the alien world of higher education. While the subjects in London's study were white and working class and, hence, did not have to grapple with differences of ethnicity, class, or race upon entry into "an urban, white, working-class community college" (1986, p. 92), London reported painful transitions for many of these students who found that their relationships with family and friends needed to be renegotiated. Since the students themselves and others felt that enrollment in a liberal arts program of study bespoke aspirations to white-collar status, alliances with those who were not going on to college were now challenged. Consequently, these first-generation college students found themselves in a double bind. On the one hand, having dared to try to rise

above their "station in life" by going to college, to do poorly academically would be personally devastating and publicly shameful. On the other hand, to be very successful academically would signal an incontrovertible change of identity. The distress of facing such a discontinuity helps to explain, London suggested, the anti-academic tendencies of some first-generation college students (1986).

London's 1986 study sharpens the focus through which we view first-generation college students who must straddle the chasms of culture, race, class, religion, or gender when they enroll in college. In a later study of the irreconcilable incongruities faced by first-generation college students, London (1989) aptly described the "leaving off" of the first-generation college students' home culture and the "taking on" of the new college culture as "breaking away." The terms precisely encapsulate the transitional process of the working class white students in London's earlier research and demonstrate Weber's (1968) theory that the most important social role of education is to inculcate those being educated into the culture of a social class. Membership in a status group, Weber argued, requires a particular style of life and is designated by badges such as vocabulary, accent, social conventions, tastes in clothing and food, habits of consumerism, and attitudes regarding outsiders (1968). Against the backdrop of London's and Weber's findings, it seems clear that for first-generation college students whose race, class, culture, religion, or gender bars them from Weberian certification within the new social class of the college, "breaking away" must be followed or accompanied by "breaking in," my own term. "Breaking in" becomes necessary when the culture of a college or university does not open fully or willingly to first-generation students. This observation is supported by Weber who indicated that those who aspire to a status group

but are not from the group's class, religious, ethnic, and racial background may not be awarded full membership (1968). Ironically, a successful bid for resocialization into the status group of the college is often a cause of great consternation for first-generation college students. They worry about what their friends and family will say about their new status which marks them as both different from and better than those they are leaving behind. In writing of her transition to the academic life, LaPaglia (1994) confirmed that the need for personal reconciliation over upward mobility through education may not stop with one's graduation from college:

When I think of the impact of this [ethnic factory] background on my life and work, I picture someone with one foot in the working class and one foot on a ladder going up, unwilling to commit to a single, more stable stance. To do so would mean betrayal and treachery in some nebulous way. My awkward posture is made easier, if not more graceful, by the fact that although I have a proper academic rank (professor), degree (doctorate) and discipline (the humanities), I am on the faculty of a community college, which is not seen as "really" academic by those who are affiliated with four-year schools.

Therefore, I usually don't feel like an outsider with my community college colleagues, though interacting with a few of particularly WASPish bent can still make me uncomfortable. (1994, p. xii)

Specific Barriers to College Success

If "breaking in" can continue to elude someone of LaPaglia's accomplishments, full acceptance into the culture of college may seem an impossibility for many first-generation college students. Their problems, as reflected in the literature, are many and appear to spiral outward from the simple fact of their first-generation status. In a paper presented at the Southern Education Foundation Panel on Educational Opportunity and Postsecondary

Desegregation in Austin, Texas, Rendon (1994), a first-generation college graduate, identified key issues that influence the participation of minorities and the poor in higher education. These issues mirror the results of research about first-generation college students which are set forth in much of the literature and can be used as an organizing force in a review of the findings.

Rendon (1994) examined obstructions to the educational success of first-generation college students, pointing to self-doubt and their first-generation status as significant barriers, in and of themselves. First-generation status, Rendon reasoned, creates a multitude of other barriers such as fear of failure, fear of being stereotyped as incompetent or lazy, intimidation by the institution, and doubts about being "college material." Additional barriers included unclear academic goals and inadequate academic preparation resulting in poor cognitive, reading, writing, speaking, and test-taking skills. Cultural barriers to the success of first-generation college students cited by Rendon were reflective, in part, of her own experience (1992). Fear of cultural discontinuity, loss of identity, and breaking of family codes of solidarity mirror her initiation into college life. Rendon's (1994) depiction of an invalidating academic environment coupled with peer and community pressure not to excel effectively extend and expand London's (1989) metaphor of breaking away.

Several studies of first-generation college students reiterate Rendon's (1994) points about barriers to academic success experienced by those who straddle the culture of college and the culture of home. Lara (1992), Kiang (1992), Orozco (1995), and Rendon (1992) underscored some of the transitioning difficulties of first-generation college students outlined in Rendon's paper. An immigrant student from the Dominican Republic, Lara recounted the

confusion and trauma that she experienced when trying to fit in as a first-generation, culturally different, minority student on an American college campus. Similarly, Rendon (1992) chronicled the pangs of transition, the difficulties encountered, and the aids to persistence in her journey from the Mexican-American barrio to earn a doctoral degree and an appointment as a university professor. Kiang's (1992) study showed how first-generation Asian immigrant and refugee students faced issues of cultural dislocation, identity, and mislabeling as model students. Qualitative in approach, these works differed in methodology from a quantitative study by Orozco (1995); yet, the findings from these four studies were corroborative. Orozco sampled 144 Mexican-American students in order to examine levels of cultural adjustment among first-, second-, and third-generation college students. He found that first-generation students experienced greater degrees of cultural adjustment difficulties as well as greater degrees of resultant stress than did second- and third-generation college students.

Rendon's observations regarding the self-doubts of first-generation students were supported by Whitehall (1991) who showed how issues of entitlement, especially as they relate to self-perceptions of academic ability, affect the success with which first generation reentry women dealt with the college-going process. McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, and Davis (1991) found that of three groups of college students, the highest levels of self-esteem were perceived by students whose parents had both attended college while the lowest levels of self-esteem were experienced by first-generation college students. In a finding which could shed light on possible origins of the low aspirations and academic expectations that some first-generation college students hold for themselves, Cuadraz (1993) reported that some Mexican-Americans in her study who had earned doctorates from the University of California

at Berkeley believed that in their precollege years teachers did not expect academic excellence from them. High marks on essays or high scores on tests were met with doubt from their teachers that the Mexican-American students had actually done the work themselves. Participants in Cuadraz's study were primarily of the opinion that their teachers assumed they were less able academically -- less intelligent -- because they were Mexican-Americans. The devastation of realizing that their ethnicity was perceived as a badge of inferiority by their teachers must have been compounded by the children's awareness that their ethnicity also suggested to their teachers a lack of integrity and a propensity to pass off as their own the fruits of someone else's scholarship.

The participants in Cuadraz's study entered doctoral programs between 1967 and 1979, so their experiences as school children represent a chronological distance of well over two decades into the past. However, other studies of more recent precollege students suggest the continuation of pre-baccalaureate obstructions to the college success of first-generation students. For instance, Barahona's (1990) longitudinal study of the effects of first-generation status on the college aspirations of high school sophomores and seniors showed that first-generation students are at a marked disadvantage. Negatively affected are their aspirations to attend college, their actual college attendance, and their persistence in college. Barahona's finding that the negative effects of being a first-generation student are well entrenched by tenth grade prompted her recommendation that intervention programs which would encourage these students to prepare for college should be implemented during the beginning of junior high school.

As Rendon (1994), London (1986, 1989) and others had suggested, York-Anderson

and Bowman (1991) found that first-generation college students received less familial support for going to college than did second-generation college students. Werner (1995) identified inadequate finances as the most crucial barrier to education for first-generation college students and a lack of familial encouragement and support as the second most important factor. The study also found that Hispanic students' concern with educational barriers was inversely proportional to their identification with the Anglo culture. Studies by Brooks-Terry (1988) and Billson and Brooks (1982) looked at factors such as social and academic integration, academic rewards, commitment to the institution, and family influence on first-generation college students as compared to their second-generation counterparts. Their findings suggested the advantages of being among the second as opposed to the first generation in one's family to go to college. By building ostensibly on the works of Hicks (1981), London (1989), McCarthy (1990), Stierlin (1974), and Weis (1985), Weis (1992) observed that there are significant tensions between same race and same gender college students from different social or economic classes. Thus, the negative impact of first-generation status can override even the supposed cohesiveness of race, ethnicity, or gender.

The literature on first-generation college students staunchly supports the premise that specific barriers to college success challenge those who are the first in their families to attend college. Several scholars have identified these barriers as including low self-esteem, inadequate academic preparation, cultural discontinuity, inadequate finances, and lack of

familial support. With so much already apparently at stake when they arrive at college, it seems remarkable, indeed, that first-generation college students can actually win in the academic game.

Potential Remedies to Barriers

What are those forces that have appeared significant in advancing the success of first generation college students? The question is pivotal in that its answer may contain key strategies for the replication and enhancement of first-generation college student success. Researchers who have addressed the question include Rendon, Terenzini, and Upcraft (1994) who used open ended interviews with first-generation college students to conclude that the formation of peer support groups, familial encouragement, and involvement with faculty are positive influences on student success. Lara (1992) affirmed the influence of faculty involvement with first-generation students through her personal account of empowerment as a result of faculty mentoring. Other factors stressed in the literature as important to the success of first-generation college students include financial aid (Hewlett, 1981; Joyce, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Werner, 1995); academic preparation (Chatman, 1994; Hewlett, 1981; Kiang, 1992; Lara, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992); formalized programs to aid in admissions and persistence (Chaffee, 1992; Chatman, 1994; Hewlett, 1981; Padron, 1992; Simelton, 1994; Stein, 1992; Warner, 1992); and faculty expectations of students (Lara, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

The literature on first-generation college students states that these seven factors are significant elements in the success of this group: peer support groups; familial encouragement;

involvement with faculty; financial aid; academic preparedness; formalized aid in admissions and persistence; and faculty expectations of students. What, then, does the literature *not* say about first-generation college students?

Limitations of the Literature

Though the literature on first-generation college students considers the transition to college, specific barriers to college success, and potential remedies to the barriers, many of these studies are understandably of limited depth and scope with a resultant decrease in generalizability of their findings. Gaping questions regarding first-generation college students await additional answers, while many questions have not yet been asked. More specifically, I have discovered three major shortcomings in the literature which merit attention. I identify them below and discuss how they informed my study.

First, the literature provides few clues into how intrinsic motivations, along with life experiences, affect the matriculation and success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. Much of the literature on various social and ethnic groups has indicated that familial support has been a key factor in the educational attainment of first-generation college students. But as Cuadraz (1993) has queried, if school success is attributable to familial culture, does it follow that academically unsuccessful students lacked the proper socialization into those familial mores which breed success? More specifically, why would one child from a low socioeconomic status family become a college graduate while none of her or his siblings attempted to earn a college degree? A striking limitation of the studies I reviewed is their failure to "historicize and problematize the achievement of the individuals that comprised their

samples" (Cuadraz, 1993, p. 101). With this limitation in mind, in this study I chose to explore how family and life experiences contribute to the matriculation and subsequent educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students.

Second, my review of the literature also uncovered precious little information on those college-specific experiences -- both in- and out-of-class -- that contribute to the educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. Indeed, in their recent study of first-generation college students, Terenzini et al. (1996) noted this lacuna in the literature. They outlined three categories of what is known from the literature about first-generation college students. These categories were defined as the students' college choice process, the transition to college, and the effects of the college experience on persistence. The writers cited an absence of studies that have focused on the cognitive development or the experiences during college of first-generation students. Their study contributed to the literature by comparing first-generation and traditional students' precollege characteristics, their experiences during the first year of college, and their cognitive development. Still, a titanic gap between what is and is not known about first-generation college students continues to exist. Consequently, in this study I turned a critical eye toward identifying those specific college-related learning experiences that, from the perspective of first-generation college graduates, "made a difference" in their success as college students.

Third, I found nothing in the literature which carefully explored the relationships between college or precollege experiences and their effects on first-generation students' growth and development. At this time, we know virtually nothing about the transforming effects of college on this particular group of students. How do various college experiences,

for instance, affect the ways in which first generation college graduates who were from low socioeconomic status families live their lives and affect others as agents of change? In her study of Mexican-Americans who began their doctoral work during the “college protest” years between 1967 and 1979, Cuadraz discussed some individuals who went to graduate school at Berkeley as a means of continuing their involvement in the politics of the day. The study also indicated that the participants tended to choose professions -- such as education, law, and social services -- which enabled them to integrate their political ideals into their professional lives. Accordingly, in this study I examined (1) how, with or without the anti-establishment *Zeitgeist*, a low socioeconomic status first-generation undergraduate becomes infused with the seeds of activism; and (2) how such activism affects the life of that individual -- as a college graduate -- as well as the lives of others. Given that the number of first-generation students who are entering the nation’s colleges and universities is increasing yearly, the challenge to learn more about them is both immediate and real (Terenzini et al., 1996). This study, then, was an expedition, a journey toward understanding the characteristics that selected first-generation college graduates took with them to college, the forces that aided their achievement in college, and their subsequent influence -- as educational or social activists -- on the world at large.

Significance of the Study

In this study I sought to understand what the educational circumstances were of the outstanding participants during their precollege years, how the college-going experience was transformative for them, and how their having earned a college degree had changed their lives

as well as the lives of others. I aimed to show how various experiences -- both inside and outside college -- helped to create key contributors to a free, educated, and democratic society. By personalizing accounts of "what is lost, gained, fought for, . . . given to compromise" (Zwerling & London, 1992, p. 1) and contributed to society by this select group of first-generation college graduates, this study provides insights into the means by which these students triumphed over seemingly endless obstacles in their own education and, in so doing, became committed activists for enhanced opportunity for others. The study also adds to our understanding of how to help first-generation students achieve success. While several studies have examined the effect of extrinsic factors such as academic counseling, faculty/student interaction, and financial aid on the college success of first-generation students, my impetus stemmed from (1) a practically universal absence in the literature of how, if at all, intrinsic motivations, along with life experiences, may affect the matriculation and success of low socioeconomic status first-generation students; (2) the need for further identification and exploration of specific college experiences that positively affect the success of first-generation students; and (3) the virtually complete absence in the literature of the effects that all of these experiences have on first-generation college graduates generally, and on their lives as educational or social activists for others, specifically.

This study also provides a blueprint for instructive analysis of the published life histories of nationally and globally acclaimed contemporary Americans who were the first in their families to go to college. For instance, the study provides further illumination of just how phenomenal the achievements are of persons such as Benjamin Carson, the renown surgeon who rose from extremely humble beginnings in Detroit to become director of

pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, or Michael Eric Dyson, the one-time high school dropout turned welder who recently has been labeled by the *Village Voice* as an “intellectual for our times.” Of his experience at an elite boarding school to which he won a scholarship when he was sixteen, Dyson writes:

That short distance [thirty miles] had divided me from a world I had never known as a poor black inner-city youth: white wealth, power, and privilege. I had never gone to school with white kids before, much less wealthy white kids, many the sons and daughters of famous parents, a banking magnate here, a film giant there. I immediately experienced a Hitchcockian vertigo about the place, its seductive grandeur, warming grace, and old world elegance not enough to conceal the absurdity of racism that lurked beneath its breathtaking exterior. I left Cranbrook near the end of my second year, returning to Detroit and obtaining my diploma in night school, and taking a succession of jobs in the fast-food industry in maintenance work, and in construction. I finally became an employee at my father's alma mater, the Kelsey-Hayes Wheelbrake and Drum company, becoming an arc-welder and later unloading trains brimming with brake drums. (1993, p. xxvii)

Though drawn from a precollege experience, Dyson's words are illustrative of the first-generation student's disorientation within the collegiate world. Almost as an afterthought, this study makes us more cognizant and more appreciative of the giants among us, the famous as well as the obscure.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

A Positioned Subject Approach to Inquiry

My interest in studying first generation college graduates who overcame great obstacles to earn their college degrees was augmented by many first-generation college graduates with whom I have interacted: the Director of Business Services at a community college who became a ward of the state of Illinois when she was eleven years old and was influenced to attend college by a social worker and a teacher; a college professor and artist whose artistic talent was a gateway to college but whose decision to major in art was in direct opposition to what his blue-collar parents and community understood and respected as practical academic study; a community college president who bore the effluvium of greasy dishwater throughout four years of undergraduate school because he washed dishes in the college kitchen and could not afford the rubber gloves that would have protected his hands and arms from harsh detergents and residues of countless institutional meals. Each of these individuals expressed strong personal motivation to "make something" out of themselves. Each discovered, or was discovered by, the environmental stimuli which helped to generate their success in getting to college, in graduating, and in becoming agents for positive change in the lives of others. I am convinced that understanding how individuals such as these make

sense of their experiences prior to college, their lives as college students, and their development as educational or social activists will greatly benefit education at all levels as well as society at large. Thus, I chose to use a positioned subject approach as the primary method of inquiry in this study.

Put simply, a positioned subject approach focuses inquiry on people's understandings and interpretations of their various experiences, always from their own particular "position" within a given setting (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993). In so doing, this approach to inquiry is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that individuals actively interpret and make sense of daily experiences within the context of their own lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Van Maanen, 1990). Such an approach to inquiry seeks to understand, first and foremost, how individuals -- always from their own "positions" or "standpoints" -- construct and attach meaning to various experiences, events, and happenings in their everyday worlds.

The advantages of using the positioned subject approach for this study were compelling. Since a major objective of my research was to understand how first-generation college graduates make sense of those experiences relevant to their college years, such an approach to inquiry allowed each positioned subject to elaborate on those events from her or his own standpoint. By bringing their particular perspectives to bear on their individual lifescapes, the subjects provided unique and rich narratives from which I could derive emergent themes and patterns across their various stories. Analysis of the commonalities across these narratives promoted understanding of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students and their contributions as educational or social activists.

Study Design and Method

Consonant with a positioned subject approach, I used a multi-case study design which placed the perspectives of the interviewees squarely at the center of my inquiry. Each case highlighted the life history of a first-generation college graduate. Seventeen such life histories (or “cases”) were included in the study.

As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain, life histories are case studies that focus specifically on an individual’s experience with a certain event, with significant others, or within an organization (p. 65). Hence, life histories depend heavily upon the ability of the interviewee to remember and to convey recollections articulately. The participants must have had experiences that intersect with the researcher’s study and must be able to contribute the time required by the project. While the more time consuming life histories are generally focused upon the entire lives of the participants, I directed my study at capturing particular periods in the interviewees’ lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Specifically, I focused upon family and life experiences that contributed to college success, college-going experiences, and experiences of social or educational activism.

For this study, I completed seventeen life histories of first-generation college graduates. The in-depth interviews that I conducted with these participants provided, in turn, the foundation for my study. Focusing on limited periods in the subjects’ lives, these seventeen life histories, or multi case studies, were augmented by data garnered from secondary interviews conducted with persons who were well acquainted with the subjects. The life history method has been employed widely as a means to better understand people or

institutions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gubrium & Holstein, 1996) and served as the key mechanism in this study for unlocking discoveries about first-generation college students.

As befits the funnel structure of a case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), I began the interviews with questions that were broad in nature, communicating, I hoped, my openness to sources of pertinent information that I had hardly anticipated. In fact, I intended to invite the interviewees to share their stories rather than to give reports. This means that in the ongoing establishment and maintenance of rapport, respect, and trust between the participants and me, it was imperative that I effectively encouraged their accountability, rather than my own, for the meaning in their words (Chase, 1996). To this end, I endeavored to give careful attention to the "orientation to others embedded in [my] questions" (Chase, 1996, p.3).

Consequently, my interviews were governed by the following additional guidelines:

- I dispensed, to the best of my ability, with sociological questions since they often direct interviewees to the researcher's study interests rather than to their own life experiences. This results in sociological answers to sociological questions, an abstract and hollow interchange that is disconnected from the participants' lives. Instead, I invited subjects to talk about pertinent phases and events in their lives. As the basis for analysis, such life histories become invaluable repositories of meaningful information (Chase, 1996).
- I was attentive to submerged stories and endeavored to allow them to surface, thus promoting the telling of a richer history and providing for a broader, more detailed basis for analysis. The more fully developed the narrative, the better the chance one has of generating a strong substantive analysis that will

be generalizable to the individuals, communities, or behaviors under study (Chase, 1996).

- Finally, I sought to orient my research and analysis to the local culture of each participant. The language, meanings, and behaviors of participants' local culture groups contextualize their stories. As is true in most efforts to send or receive communication, understanding the context of the message is central to the derivation of valid meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 1996). On the other hand, individual differences among local culture members may develop from influences that are not generally normative. An appreciation of the complexity and evolutionary nature of human life helped me to avoid facile oversimplification of cause and effect in interpreting the narrative histories of the interviewees' lives (Geertz, 1993; Weiland, 1996).

Conducting life history research requires the equanimity to continually make judgments about matters such as who to interview, which leads to pursue, how interview questions should be formed and modified, which questions to ask, and whether adaptations should be made to the study design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In the effort to observe the "inspectable form" (Geertz, 1973, p. 19) of a subject's life, as a researcher it was necessary that I "decode, recognize, recontextualize, or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before [me]" (Josselson & Lieblich, 1996, p. ix). Nothing less would have animated the narratives that I wrote.

Selection of Research Subjects

In light of the purposes of this study, my sample population consisted of exemplary individuals who not only fit the criteria of being first-generation college graduates from low socioeconomic status family backgrounds, but who also are considered by members of their respective communities to be social or educational activists. To this end, I decided to use purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify and select participants for this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Identification and selection of subjects were carried out according to a number of potentially theoretically-relevant sampling criteria.

An advantage to using the snowball method is that it entails acquiring interviews with identified individuals or groups, investigating -- where practicable -- their intra-relationships (Cuadraz, 1993), and utilizing their leads to other sources of information as well. Similarly, purposive sampling provides a basis for sorting through the leads and selecting a diverse subject pool.

I began my search for subjects by tracking down well-known first-generation college graduate activists and requesting their participation in the study. I also contacted family, friends, and acquaintances from various communities who are involved in the field of education, in other forms of public service, or in community activism. Finally, I spread the word among my colleagues at work and across the nation, asking them to nominate individuals who they believed would be suitable participants for the study. Once I had compiled a list of potential subjects, I then selected seventeen study participants who varied in terms of the following sampling criteria:

Criteria for Selection of Cases	Dimensions
Age	The various age groups that are represented in the study: 28-35; 35-50; 50-60; 60+.
Gender	The number of subjects who are male and the number who are female: Female or Male.
Race/Ethnicity	The racial/ethnic background of the participants: Asian/Pacific Islander; black, non Hispanic; Hispanic; Native American; white, non Hispanic.
Institutional Characteristics (Type, Affiliation, Location)	The type of college and/or university attended by each participant: (a) Type: Carnegie Classification; (b) Affiliation: Public or Private; (c) Location.
College Major	The general category of study in which the participant earned a college degree: Arts & Humanities; Math; Science; Professional.
Profession	The job(s) that each participant holds (has held): Business; Education; Law; Medicine; Military; Ministry; Social Science.
Current Socioeconomic Status	The socioeconomic class to which each participant belongs: Upper; Middle; Lower.

The final sample included as many of the dimensions of the aforementioned sampling criteria as possible. For example, I included nine male and eight female participants who represented differing racial, ethnic, and collegiate backgrounds. I also attempted to include equal numbers of participants by age and profession categories.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

The primary method of data collection for this study was the life history interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I conducted two focus group interviews of three to four people each for at least five cases in my study.² These focus group interviews pertained largely to the activist roles of the five subjects under study and, in particular, how they have affected others as “agents of change” in their work settings and communities. Where relevant, additional information was also collected on subjects’ backgrounds and college-going experiences. I spent approximately four hours interviewing each of the seventeen participants. Each of these conversations was tape-recorded (with the participants’ permission). In addition, I kept a chronological record of what and how I learned throughout the research process (Ely et al., 1991). All interviews took place in the participants’ offices or workplaces, in their homes, in my office, and, in a few instances, in my home or in public places such as restaurants and public libraries.

All interviews were structured around three life phases of the participants: the pre-college years, the college-going experience, and the post-college years of educational or social activism. Significant but open-ended interview questions were asked regarding areas such as participants’ status, background, type of college or university attended, college-going experiences, profession, and service related activities. These initial questions were broad-based and purposively designed to invite participants to tell their stories. A general outline of the interview protocol used can be found in Appendix B.

² The life histories of five participants will receive extended focus in the study.

For the purposes of triangulation and to provide a richer context for the findings, I also conducted secondary interviews with people who knew the participants or their work. Secondary interviewees included professional colleagues, students, family members, teachers, mentors, employees, friends, and those the participants have helped along the way.

Document Analysis

In addition to interviews, various types of documents were analyzed as a secondary method of data collection for this study. Types of documents commonly used as data sources in narrative inquiry include newsletters, class plans, rules and regulations, pictures, metaphors, and statements of personal philosophy (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The following documents were analyzed in gathering data and in generating interview questions for this study:

- Photographs
- Letters
- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Publications by or about the participants
- Diaries
- Brochures, pamphlets, flyers, and other printed materials on services or programs involving the participants as educational or social activists
- Videos and television programs
- Speeches delivered by or relating to the participants
- Performances by the participants
- Publications such as high school and college yearbooks
- Institutional histories and/or other informational materials on professional organizations and agencies to which the participants belong.

As the research study unfolded, pertinent sources of information which presented themselves were incorporated into the data collection process.

Data Analysis Procedures

In life history research, both the participants and the researcher use the narrative histories as the means of making meaning or of forming understandings. This collaboration requires that the researcher assume the empathic stance. This stance, in turn, orients the researcher to the participants' experiences and ways of constructing meaning. Since meaning is generated by the intersection of the participants' lives and the researcher's interpretations, it seems clear that the researcher must understand the primary source of data, the narratives themselves (Josselson, 1996).

In this study, my ideas as researcher intersected with the participants' stories through analysis. I used my own perceptions at the beginning of the analysis to create explicit linkages of "datum to datum, for making initial sense out of what would otherwise be disparate bits of information" (Newmann & Bensimon, 1990, p. 681). It should be noted, however, that my perceptions served simply as points of departure, rather than points of reference, in the analysis (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993).

After an interview was conducted, I identified emergent themes by using the constant comparative method (Haworth & Conrad, 1996). Thus, I reviewed the interview transcripts, recording and cross-referencing important data events, experiences, characteristics, and circumstances of each participant (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Then I began building upon these emerging themes by deriving (1) profiles of first generation college graduates who were from low socioeconomic status families; (2) family, life, and college experiences that promote the academic and social success of first-generation college students prior to, during,

and after graduation from college; and (3) short and longer-term positive effects of earning a degree, particularly in the area of social or educational activism on self and on others.

I recorded these emergent themes in analytic memoranda that were later used to lend greater precision and appropriateness to my research questions and to indicate further areas of inquiry. "Data collection and processing, research implementation and research design, description and explanation -- all will occur simultaneously in a back-and-forth process of progressive understanding" (Crowson, 1987, p. 41). The research method, then, while not following a strict linear mode, utilized data collection followed by analysis as an ongoing research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Using the constant comparative method in my study helped to categorize the continuously emerging data. Coding categories for the study, already suggested as sampling criteria, were augmented by analytic schemes which were suggested by the data. Becker and Geer (1961), who studied medical students, used "incidents" and "perspectives" as categories for data analysis. Ely et al. (1991) advanced "thinking units" as a category for data analysis. From my own experience as an African-American woman whose parents did not complete grammar school, I correctly suspected that parental attitudes toward learning might emerge from the data as a category for analysis. Also, from what I have seen of other first-generation college graduates from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, I suspected, again correctly, that "ascending cross-class identification" and college learning environments might be other categories for analysis. My intention was not to force preliminary, restrictive, or presumptive structures upon the data analysis procedures but, instead, to allow effective and efficacious coding categories to suggest themselves.

Specifically, I derived coding categories for this study through close and continued connection with the interviews. As a means of becoming better acquainted with the interviewees and their histories, I transcribed all of the taped interviews myself. Each transcription was placed in a three-ring binder with text on the right page and blank space on the left. As I read and reread the interviews, I noted themes or important concepts on the blank left pages. Next, I identified recurrent themes or concepts. Placing these on a grid, I matched them with the interviewees -- along with their transcript page numbers -- to whom they applied. Reading the transcripts over and over again prompted the expansion as well as the shrinkage of the thematic grid.

Once the thematic grid seemed somewhat complete, I made two copies of the transcripts and of the grid. Then, I subdivided a copy of the grid into three sections that corresponded most directly to my three research questions. Next, using the transcript page numbers from the grid, I excised pertinent sections from each interview which corresponded to the themes that I had identified. For each research question, I isolated common themes and supporting quotations from as many interviews as feasible. Thus, I created a file for each research question based on the common themes and the relevant interview data. Only then did I attempt an outline of what the interviews seemed to reveal. Finally, I set out to descriptively and parsimoniously construct an insightful analysis of the participants' family, life, collegiate, and activist experiences.

Even though the constant comparative method of analysis presents many advantages to the narrative history researcher, I found that several cautions were in order. One was that while some phenomena were common to all participants in the study, others were unique.

Such diversity should not be treated as error, but “as either the not-yet-known or the unknowable” (Josselson, 1996, p. 33). A major challenge in analyzing the interviews was to work toward understanding all the data, not just that which neatly fell within prescribed parameters (Josselson, 1996). A second caution was that in fitting participants into categories, I needed to keep in mind that humans are complex beings and that dichotomizing people denies that complexity. “People are not *either* introverted or extroverted” (Josselson, 1996, p. 33). Thirdly, the narratives that the participants create are not records of actual fact but, rather, are a way of making meaning out of the chaos of the perceptions of their lives. Consequently, the constant comparative method did not render a measurement of *how things actually were* across the various experiences of all the participants. Using the constant comparative method did, however, enhance my ability to construct meaning through analysis of the participants’ perceptions (Josselson, 1996).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is of overarching concern to the qualitative researcher, just as validity and reliability are to those whose inquiries are quantitative in nature. But the time has passed when there was little interest in research subjects' stories beyond how they might corroborate each other or what the incongruities among them might mean (Gubrium & Holstein, 1996). Life history research is weighted in "documenting the interpretive practices through which the realities of social settings are assembled" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1996, p.46); narrative linkages or the phrases and experiences that participants combine to communicate the subjective meanings in their life stories; and local culture or the parochial

vocabularies, experiences, and meanings that typify a particular community (Gubrium & Holstein, 1996).

Trustworthiness, in this context, relies upon three criteria. One is unstinting attention to the nature and variability of lived contexts. The researcher must strive diligently to examine the nature of environments, situations, and events and their effects on the participants' lives. Did the context under study change over time? Which contextual variables had a lesser effect on the participant, and which had a stronger effect (Weiland, 1996)? A second criterion for trustworthiness is the researcher's recognition of and demonstrated respect for the interactive process -- between interviewer and subject -- in the subject's creation, through telling, of her or his life history. Thus, the researcher understands and promotes proactively the creative involvement of the participant. The researcher accepts the fact that narrative histories are related through the interpretive lenses of their creators and that, consequently, they may reflect the participants' senses, views, or impressions of larger life issues. Moreover, the participants' interpretive lenses are crafted from the contexts or conventions of the local or organizational culture (Gubrium & Holstein, 1996). In writing the narrative history of a life, the researcher must remember that important components of his or her role include collaborator, elicitor, listener, recorder, and analyzer. The creator, first and foremost, is the participant.

The third criterion for trustworthiness is the ability of the researcher to view the conventional problems of "completeness, reliability, and generalizability . . . in light of the biographer's quest to bring forward the qualities of lived experience, mindful of how discourse conventions both give form to and constrain the activity of writing a life. The

perspective of the subject must be given priority” (Weiland, 1996, p. 61). The unique, “nonnormative” (Weiland, 1996, p. 61), or atypical experience or interpretation must have a place in the narrative, and the sense of the inexpressible must be awarded at least intangible manifestation in the concrete form, structure, or ethos of the written history (Weiland, 1996). As Becker (1978) puts it, life history advances trustworthiness in research by allowing the “faithful rendering of the subject's experience and interpretation of the world he lives in” (p. 290). It seems, then, that as regards trustworthiness, conscientiously, ethically, and skillfully created life history is its own, and best, defense.

Nevertheless, certain processes that I employed in this study may be seen as nods to convention. I hope they have proved to be measures that augment the richness of detail and density of scope in the life histories. One such measure is triangulation which was achieved through the use of multiple data sources (purposive sample of primary and secondary interviewees) and methods (interviews, document analysis).

As another “nod to convention,” I sought when needed member checks or interviewee corroboration of the accuracy of my interview transcriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, I recorded, explained, and organized my logs of the data collected in a lucid enough fashion that any member of my dissertation committee could readily comprehend and evaluate -- via an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) -- the direction of this study and the credibility of its findings (Crowson, 1987; Ely et al., 1991).

Limitations of the Study

An important limitation of this study stems from its size. One could reasonably conclude that there are many first-generation college graduate activists from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, but there are only seventeen in this study. Because seventeen participants is a relatively small sample, the study can make no claims to generalizability to all first-generation college graduates. In addition, since no one knows how many first-generation college students, first-generation college graduates, or first-generation college graduate activists there are, it is impossible even to speculate about what a representative sized sample would be.

Another limitation of the study is that constraints of time and geography ruled out face-to-face interviews with a few of the secondary interviewees. In those cases, telephone interviews were substituted. This means that many nonverbal cues, so important in oral communication, may have been lost.

Finally, some would-be focus group members -- because of factors such as scheduling conflicts -- had to be interviewed individually. Their interactions with the group were missed and, thereby, could have altered the group dynamics or the quality of the group's participation.

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

BY THEIR WORDS WE KNOW THEM: THE LIFE STORIES OF FIVE FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATES

I'm writing a musical that's a tribute to my mom. I think she would be very proud of it. It's called Pelicans in the Wilderness and it's from a Bible verse. The minister quotes it in the play: "I don't want to be like a pelican in the wilderness; I don't want to be like an owl in the desert," meaning not to have the things we need to survive and do well in the world. I like the message of that because it's about searching for your own sense of survival and self.

Diane

For this study, I interviewed a diverse group of seventeen first-generation college graduates. Their life stories provide compelling testimony that with the well placed help of others, many economically destitute and academically clueless children can be transformed into college graduates and activists whose influence is wide in scope and deep in meaning.

In the following five chapters, I recount the stories of five of the participants in my study in narrative detail. I have chosen this approach in order to provide a vivid, contextualized account of the complexity of these participants' lives and the many obstacles and issues they negotiated as first-generation college graduates. And, to be sure, while all seventeen of the individuals I interviewed for this study told a compelling life story, I have chosen to highlight the following five stories for two reasons. First, these five particular accounts reflect a great degree of diversity -- in terms of race/ethnicity, geographical area of childhood home, and profession -- while also portraying important commonalities. For instance, three of the five stories presented here are of participants -- Mary, Jim, and Ray --

who were born within three years of each other in the United States, but whose school experiences were widely divergent. They hail from different parts of the country, and their stories cut across black, white, and Hispanic racial/ethnic categories. Lula and Mary, separated in age by twenty-five years, have in common characteristics including race, gender, and birth and rearing in the rural south. Differences and similarities such as these are not focal to the study, but they are important in that they lend richness and variety to the findings.

Second, the details of these five stories impart different points of emphasis. Mary's story illustrates, against the harsh background of her early environment, the influence of the school, family, and others on her college success. "I tell my students now that I really grew up as a slave," she said to me. As I heard her story, I understood the reality of her statement, even though she was born in 1946, eighty-one years after slavery was abolished. Ray's story stresses the positive role of the community in a New York City ghetto -- and others outside the ghetto who reached in -- in his academic success. Florence's story emphasizes the impact of the college and the informal curriculum on her life, while Jim's story portrays the activist role and its impact on other's lives. And Lula's story, set in an island off the coast of South Carolina where Gullah is still spoken, shows the impact of the community and its history on her academic and life experiences.

All of the interviewees gave me more than their stories. They gave me gifts of time, knowledge, hope for the future, and hospitality. I interviewed Lula in November during the annual Heritage Days celebration on St. Helena Island. Thousands of people from throughout the country attended the festival. My husband and I stayed with Lula, ate her fabulous cooking, toured Penn Center, learned about the exhibits at the museum, viewed praise houses,

visited almost the entire island, and partook of the Heritage Days events where, at an old time prayer meeting, we saw Lula and many other islanders do an ancient dance of religious praise called “the shout” and sing songs so old and so connected to our African forebears that I, born in North Carolina and raised in the Baptist church, had no more familiarity with many of them than I had with Gullah, the beautiful language of the island that I had never heard before.

I interviewed Jim in his studio. Before starting our tape recording session, I looked around Jim’s studio at all his works on display and he answered my questions, telling me the stories behind the paintings. At the end of our session, he gave me an oversized print of a breathtaking painting that commanded my eyes from wherever I stood in the studio. Prior to my meeting with Florence, she kindly arranged for me to interview her in a private reading room at the Evanston Public Library. Her generosity in meeting me there cut a great amount of time from my commute to our interview. The exquisite singing in Mohawk and wonderful storytelling that she did just for me continue to lift my spirits. Mary received me in her home like a member of her family, even though I am not. Ray received me the same way, since I am.

Their stories -- told in first person -- follow. Each comprises one of the next five chapters with a few words of italicized introduction from me. While I edited the interview transcriptions in order to reconstruct them into more holistic, flowing narratives, I was careful to honor as completely as I could the interviewees’ exact meanings, words, and nuances throughout.

CHAPTER III

MARY SWOPES -- OF SERVICE

Every summer before my mother died, she and my dad would travel from their home in North Carolina to visit their children in the north. In 1991, during her last summer, I recall that one afternoon my mother was cooking yellow squash and collards, our dinner vegetables, at my sister's house when several women dropped in. They said they were not hungry, but drawn perhaps by nostalgia for their own mothers and delicious meals from the past, they ate dinner with us. Mary Swopes, who was among the group of visitors, invited my parents to breakfast that next morning.

My sister told me about Mary's inter- and intra-national travels and about her quiet activism. My sister explained that Mary's whole life seemed instructive and that she used its negative as well as its positive aspects as points of illumination and transformation for others. Five years later when I began this study, I asked my sister to serve as a liaison in connecting me with Mary Swopes. "Whatever I have," Mary told me by phone, "whatever I can do to help with your study, I would be happy to do. I don't know whether I know anything that will be of value to you, but you are welcome to whatever I can give." I believe that the value of Mary's contributions not only to my study but also to society are far greater than my words can say.

Mary, 49, teaches fourth grade in the Waukegan, Illinois, public school system. Her story follows.

Sandria arrives exactly on time, and I leave her in my sun-drenched kitchen where she can contemplate my history and, by extension, her own. I will take these few minutes to dry and braid my wet hair. Sandria's time need not be wasted. If she can read the signs, she will envision my grand aunt, my grandmother's sister, who gave me the handmade broom that my husband Chester has mounted for me above the kitchen doorway. She will see my grand aunt Ellen Proffit go to her kitchen in 1981 and fetch me that broom, a gift made by her own hands. Dead these last fifteen years, Grand Aunt Ellen went down behind her house, across her field, and cut the sage that she would use to make the broom. She used her knife to smooth the bottoms of the sage and cut off the rough ends before putting the broom together. Neatly and firmly tied, each straw in the handle is perfectly even, a sign of skill, a promise of durability. But the broom has never been used, for I am preserving it in memory and in appreciation of its uniqueness.

I was born in a little town called Luverne, Alabama, on October 6, 1946. My mother was Cora Williams, born Armstrong. My father was Willie Williams. My dad finished third grade; my mother finished fifth grade. My dad really couldn't read or write, but my mother could read and write. They had fifteen children, eleven of whom are living. Two died before I was born, and my mother miscarried two. I'm the seventh birth, and I'm the fifth living. I have always heard that there is something special about the seventh child. I don't know what it is, but I happen to be that seventh child.

I am the first in the history of my family ever to go to college. None of my brothers finished regular high school. My oldest sister finished high school. My sister next to me finished. I have another sister who never finished, but she did get a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). And I have one brother who finished high school but in the special education area. He was born at the time my mother was going through the change. She had thought that she was finished having children. She raised six boys and five girls. I have three brothers who are older than I am and three who are younger. I have one sister who is older than I am and three who are younger. With eleven children in the family, we could have had our own football team if we'd had time to play football.

We grew up in the country, on a farm. I tell my students now that I really grew up as a slave because my dad was a sharecropper, and sharecropping was really a sophisticated name for slavery. My dad farmed eighteen to twenty acres of cotton, twenty acres of peanuts, forty to fifty acres of corn, and, therefore, my brothers had to stay home from school in order to farm the land. The plantation owner who was our landlord required that they stay home and work. Of course, the white people were in control, and at the end of the year they would decide whether or not you had a profit. So at the end of each year, you barely broke even or you were in debt, and you had to stay on.

I really liked school when I was growing up, but I never went to school on the first day. When I was small I had to stay home because my older siblings, who would have taken me to school, had to stay home to work in the fields, and when I was a bit older, I had to stay home to work in the fields myself. I was a senior in high school before I had perfect attendance. By that time my father had stopped farming and was working in Montgomery.

During most of the years that he farmed, my father didn't have tractors and other modern farming equipment so almost everything was done by hand. My father and my brothers used to walk behind mules. But in the later years, I guess five years prior to my dad's leaving plantation life, the white man he worked for did have a tractor. We had moved from one plantation to another. My brother drove the tractor. My dad said that he was so used to walking behind a mule that he didn't really want to be bothered with the tractor. But I know that tractor work was easier than walking behind a mule pushing a plow or whatever, and my father wanted to spare my brother.

I didn't plow, but I used to put soda or fertilizer around the corn; I used to hoe the peanuts; I used to hoe the cotton and chop the cotton. There is a difference between hoeing and chopping. We would chop first, and then the next time, we would hoe. You chop when the cotton is about six or seven inches high. What you do really is you thin it, leaving two or three stalks per hill. Later, you hoe the cotton, which means you get the grass out. We had to do the same to the peanuts. Sometimes we would have to *pull* the grass out of the peanuts to keep our hoes from disturbing the nuts forming under the ground. Once the cotton was mature, we had to go into the fields with the cotton sacks and pick the cotton. We would be in the fields from sunup to sundown picking the cotton. In late fall when the weather had cooled, the remaining buds of cotton, or "scrap cotton," would be ready for picking. Scrap cotton is very difficult to take from the bolls, so we would "pull" the cotton; we would take the cotton and the boll as well. After the cotton was in, we would go in the peanut fields and "dig" the peanuts. First, we would plow up the peanuts. Then we would erect poles in the fields about every ten to fifteen feet, and we would wrap the peanuts around the poles so they

would dry. Weeks later, after the peanuts were dry, the men would bring the “pea picker” into the field to pick the peanuts from the dried vines. As the machine would separate the peanuts from the vines, the vines would be baled into hay. My job was to help roll the hay away from the machine and put it into stacks. The hay would be stored in the barn and would be used to feed the animals over the winter. Also in the fall we would have to harvest the corn. We would go into the fields and pull the dried ears of corn from the stalks. We would store it in the barn to feed the animals all winter. We would feed on it, too, because all our meal for dumplings and cornbread was made from our corn, ground at the gristmill, and kept in a can in the kitchen. The corn also served as seed for planting the next year’s crops.

Digging peanuts was very dirty work. It puts layers of dirt in your hair, in your eyes, up your nose. Your body would hurt from constantly bending over to get the peanut plants, then shaking the dirt off the roots, and placing the plants on the stack. But none of the farm work was easy. The cotton bolls were so sharp! They would prick and cut our hands and arms. At times, at the end of the day our hands looked like we had chicken pox. We had to pick too fast to guard against tearing our skin. It was a job that had to get done, and my dad would say that we had to get the cotton in before the gale set in. The gale is a consistent rain, and when it is raining, you can’t pick the cotton because it’ll mildew and you won’t get the same price for it. The gale came around the first of November every year. Usually we had the cotton in at that time, but I recall one time we had to pick some cotton during gale season. At that time we were “pulling” the cotton. There isn’t that much in the field; it’s very scattered. Normally little children would pick one row of cotton at a time. When we were older, we had to pick two rows at a time. But there were times when there was so much to

do that my sister, brother, and I, all three, would pick three rows at a time. It was a lot of work and it had to be done fast because sometimes my dad would say, "We have to pick a hundred pounds of cotton today." And you would know that you really had to work as a child to pick a hundred pounds of cotton. I started picking cotton when I was eight years old. When I was about thirteen, I was able to pick a hundred pounds a day, but about eighty-eight pounds was more normal for me.

Picking cotton, like all other work, was a family effort. We knew the problem it would cause my dad, and consequently the rest of us, if we didn't get the work done. But we were taught to work, even from an early age. About as early as we were walking well, we were given responsibilities around the house. And my dad would not let us stay in bed after sunup. Even on Saturdays we had to get out of bed. He would find something for us to do. We were in the fields after school from Monday through Friday, when we got to go to school, and we would work until dark. On Saturdays we sometimes had to work in the fields from six in the morning until noon. At twelve o'clock we would leave the fields and do the chores around the house. We'd have to sweep the yard, an area around the house that didn't have any grass in it, and we'd go in the woods and get those dogwood branches to use as rakes. We had to chop the wood for fire because we had a wood stove for cooking and heating. Washing, ironing, scrubbing the floors, and cleaning the house also kept us busy on Saturday afternoons. I remember my dad would put twelve holes in a wooden block, and we would have to fill those holes with dried corn shucks. Then we would dip the shucks in hot water and use that to scrub the floors. We had to make the soap that we used to clean the floors. We made all our own soap.

in the book about a woman who worked hard and did her job every day and her husband was always complaining about the work she was doing. So she told him to stay home and do her work and she would go and do his job. He took her up on this, and she could do his job, but he couldn't do hers. And I thought, "There has to be another job that I can do. I don't want to do this job for the rest of my life." I thought of our lives working on the farm year in and year out, and those people were not really paying my dad, and they were living in a better house than we were living in, but we were doing the work. And I couldn't understand that.

My mom and dad were Christian people, and I used to pray as a child because we believed in prayer. We would pray constantly, and I know that was the backbone of our strength and our endurance. So I said, "Lord, I know there is something else out there for me to do. I can't live like this for the rest of my life." And I thought that through reading, I would find help to change my life. I just wanted to do something different. And I recall asking my dad to get me some books to read -- to just buy a newspaper, but he said he didn't have the money. I didn't understand why he didn't have twenty-five cents to buy a newspaper. Twenty-five cents was the cost of a Sunday paper, but during the week you could get a paper for fifteen cents. Not truly understanding my father's situation, I used to cry, and I'd say, "Daddy, just at least buy a newspaper. I just want something to read." I remember crying about a week begging my daddy to buy me a newspaper. I didn't realize at that time that my dad was trying to save his money -- he had to save up fifteen cents to buy the newspaper. But he apparently got another dime because he got me a Sunday paper. He got that newspaper! I used to read that paper over and over. I didn't want to lose it because I didn't know how long it would take me to get another one. I would come home at night, after we would get

out of the field, and get the lamp, and I would sit by the lamp and read the newspaper. I read it so often that the words began to disappear. I came to realize that newsprint isn't permanent. But I read that paper for a long time. I read it over and over again because that's all I had to read.

I had tried to learn to read by reading the Bible. I know it can trip a lot of educated people up right now, but I would just say the words I thought I could say. A lot of the time I would ask my mom what a word was, and she would try to help me. As time went on, I came to understand that she didn't know many of those words and was just doing the best she could to help me. Often I would put in my own words or ideas, guessed from the context, to help me pick up whatever meaning I could.

Even in school we did not read phonetically; we were not taught phonics. I do remember we would have a picture, like an apple, and we would have to say, "A is for apple, B is for bat, C is for cat, D is for dog," and so on. We had to say that every day. When I would see other words, I would just kinda put those sounds together. I know that for *bed* I'd have to remember that b is like *buh* and e is like *eh* for *elephant* and d is like *duh* for *dog*. Sometimes when I was putting sounds together, I would actually get the word.

A great influence in my early life as a student was my fourth grade teacher who later became my fifth and seventh grade teacher. He used to read to us. I loved that. I loved hearing the words as he read. In second, third, fourth, and fifth grades, I attended school in a little two room house where the teachers were a husband and wife team. The wife taught second and third grades, and the husband taught fourth and fifth. There was another lady who taught first grade, but her class met in the church. We didn't have a school like the white

children had. We had the old books from the white school. We never got new books. I was a senior in high school before I ever saw a new book. The white children would use the books, and then they would send them on to us for use. A lot of the times we never saw the covers of a book because the white children would have torn the covers off before the books got to us. Our teacher would take those worn out books and would say, "Maybe we can salvage this one." That way he would try to find a book for everyone. Actually, there were never enough books for everyone, so we had to share. I remember sitting in the classroom when three of us had to share the single copy of that little blue-backed speller in order to copy the words down. I remember sharing math books. Sometimes four or five of us would crowd around a single math book. We never once had enough books for everybody.

I recall being in a class with three grades, and there were about twenty-nine children in the room. Because books were so scarce, we had to take turns taking a book home. And sometimes there were problems. If a child had to walk a long way and it was raining and the child dropped the book and it got wet, the teacher would look skeptically at letting us take the books home. He'd say, "I think you have to leave the books here." When we did take the books home, all of us children had to compromise. If you took the math book today, then I would take the spelling book. My teacher would give us time to do homework in class. If he were working with the fourth graders, the fifth graders would be doing work in the corner. The children who had taken a particular book home would help the others with that subject. We were also teaching each other. There is all this talk about collaborative learning today; we were doing it back then. We just didn't apply any fancy names to it. There was such love in the classroom at that time, such willingness to help each other. I think the fact that both of

my teachers were Christian people and we had devotion every morning before school led the Holy Spirit to guide us in so many ways, and the thanks and praise which began our days encouraged every child to really help one another.

The black children who lived in my area were in my situation; they couldn't go to school every day, but most were able to pass from one grade to the next. There were aspects of our situation that I could not understand. We were working so hard every day for these white people, the white children had books to read, a big pretty red brick building to have school in, mowed grass on the yard; we were going to school in an old church with no grass on the yard. They had swings on their playground. We had to make our toys and the playground equipment that we used. My teacher, the boys, and even the girls, too, would go in the woods behind the church and cut down logs and bring them back. My teacher would bring his saw and a hole digger to school. I remember that we made what we'd call today a teeter-totter. We called it a see-saw. We made a flying jenny. We would make our own balls and bats. Everybody would bring old socks to school, and we would stuff some of them with cotton. We would then take another sock and unravel it. The socks in those days were made of cotton, and they would be comprised of one continuous string. You'd take that string and wrap it around the sock with the cotton in it until it was as hard as you wanted it to be. How well you wrapped the sock determined whether it was a hard ball or a soft ball. My teacher would cut a limb from the woods, and he would use a brace -- a sheer, they call them -- and he would shave the wood down and make a bat. And for the girls, we just had a flat board, like a plank, and my teacher would curve the end so our hands could fit around it, and that's what we used for the softball. We would throw ropes in the trees and attach a piece of

leather, salvaged from peanut pickers, for the seats. These were our swings. Our teacher would also bring old tires and attach them by rope to the trees. Some children could swing in the tires while others would use the leather swing. We also played horseshoes. I think my teacher's grandfather had those horseshoes and would let us use them from time to time.

I knew that I could do something different with my life when I was twelve years old. That's when I received Christ, and it was at that moment that things just opened up for me. I met my first grade teacher's brother who was in college at the time. I had never heard of college. I knew my teachers had to have gotten training somewhere, but this was the first time I had direct knowledge of college, and he made it sound like a terrific place to be. He was going to be a teacher. I remember telling my mother I would like to be a teacher. She said that it would be good for me to become a teacher, that people always need to be taught, that there will always be children who need teachers. At the time, we couldn't think about being anything beyond a teacher or a nurse, so I started thinking then that I wanted to become a teacher.

Another important thing that happened to me was that in seventh grade, I had the same instructor who had taught me in fourth and fifth grades. He let me keep attendance. He put me in charge of the register because he thought I had good penmanship. In fact, my penmanship was better than his. I would record the children's names, days present, days absent, what have you. That was fascinating to me. I would do all this recording and take it to the principal's office and he would send it to, I think, the superintendent. So I felt certain that I wanted to be a teacher. But I thought I wanted to be a physical education teacher because I enjoyed athletics.

I did go on to break records when I ran track in high school. I also played basketball and did a little high jumping. In eleventh grade I decided I wanted to be a home economics teacher because my home economics instructor made sewing so much fun. I had seen my mother sew a lot because she always made all our clothes. My mother was a good seamstress who sewed for people in the community. Usually in home economics class, students were required to make one dress for a course project, but I was able to finish my project and make a second dress. I liked sewing, and my teacher was impressed by what I did; yet, by the time I got to Tuskegee, I had changed. I decided I wanted to work with children and wound up majoring in elementary education. But I first knew that I wanted to teach when I was twelve years old and my teacher gave me that opportunity to help him. That's one of the things that makes me want to strive and to help others today -- it's my memory of how he gave me that opportunity. Somebody may look at what my teacher did as a small thing, but to me it was gargantuan. He valued what I could do and gave me responsibility and experience in management.

Another thing that helped me greatly was my teacher's praying. I loved to hear him pray. I remember that our devotion did not stop at the usual time one morning. We must have had prayer and singing for about an hour and a half that day. My sister could sing very well, and my teacher could sing very well. After he prayed, someone sang a song. Then he sang a song. Then someone read scripture, and then my sister sang a song. Everyone was so filled with the spirit. I accepted Jesus as my Savior that day in the classroom. And I said to the Lord that day, "Lord, just let me treat others like I want to be treated." And it was like a philosophy that stuck in my head. I just thank my teacher over and over for the spiritual

devotion. Every teacher at that time did spiritual devotion, but it seemed that his was just different.

Even at that time, I could see that my teacher would go beyond the normal to show that he cared for all his students. He didn't mind spanking us. He would whip anybody that got out of line. When he did whip someone, they knew that they deserved it. And afterward he would let us know that he loved us anyway. He would hug us and praise us when we did good things. He was just a great motivator through praise, through letting us stay in at lunch time to work on something we wanted to learn. I loved learning the multiplication tables. We would sing them jazzed up: "Two times one equal two, two times two equal four. . ." He would give us long multiplication problems like $5,292 \times 12$. We'd do the work on the board, and he would time us to see how fast we were. It was so much fun! So we spent many recesses doing multiplication tables on the board. When we'd go out to play at recess, sometimes he'd come out and play with us. And when we were making equipment, he might say we needed an eight foot pole, and we would have to do the measuring. I didn't know it at the time, but we were getting math and we were having to think critically because he'd give us instructions as to what we had to do. He was a great teacher. He gave us the opportunity to have ownership in what we were learning. He showed us that you don't have to lose your sense of play to be a grownup. He'd get on the other end of that teeter-totter and we'd go way up in the air because he was a grownup and much bigger than we were.

In terms of getting the money to go to college, I think I was in the right place at the right time and happened to graduate in the right year. When I got ready to go off to college, I recall my dad was very sad because he wanted me to go to college, but he didn't want me

to go. He didn't want me to go because he knew he didn't have the money to send me. He wanted me to go because he knew that I wanted to better my life, I wanted to get an education. So I told him to just let me go, let me try.

Tuskegee had a work study program at that time. It was a government program that allowed students to begin work in the summer so they could make the money they needed to start paying their tuition and board for the fall semester. Students could work all year to defray college costs. It so happened that my class graduated from high school during the last year of the program. But prior to my going to Tuskegee, I had to have a physical exam; I had to send in my \$15.00 application fee. My dad did not have the money, and he could not go to the white man, the plantation owner, to ask for it because he had already told my dad that he would not be getting any more money. The owner had no idea I was going to college at that time.

My family had two cows. One of them was my mother's, and that was our milk cow. So in order to help me, my mother told my dad to sell her cow. My dad had a man come over and put the cow on a truck to take it to sell. Those white people gave my dad \$65.00 for that cow! My dad had to give the man some money for driving the cow to be sold. My dad took the rest of the money and used some of it to take me to the dentist and to the doctor. When I think of how my dad and my mom, the whole family, sacrificed to do it! My mother was kinda sickly, and I remember my dad gave my mom five or ten dollars to get some medicine and have her glasses fixed. When he finished taking care of these things, he gave me the rest of the money, \$15.00, and that's what I had to go to college.

I remember my mother had sold some candy and bought some fabric, and she had made me two dresses and a skirt. I had a couple of blouses, and my high school teacher had given me a blouse and a pair of pants. I had two pairs of shoes. My aunt had given me two sheets. And my mother had given me a couple of towels that we really didn't have. They were mismatched, but they were what she had. Everything I had was in a little footlocker, and that's what I went to Tuskegee with. I had told my high school teacher that I didn't want to go to college because college students have pretty clothes. I didn't have a lot of things, but my teacher said the people at college wouldn't mind my clothes, that they wouldn't even look at what I was wearing. So I didn't think about that much anymore because I felt good about the clothes my mother had made me.

So I went off to Tuskegee. One of my high school teachers drove us. He and his wife both were high school teachers, and he was the brother of the man who had been my teacher in fourth, fifth, and seventh grades. I thank them every day. My dad didn't have a car and had no concept of where Tuskegee was. When my teacher and his wife came to pick me up, they also picked up two boys and another girl from my high school class. Four of us went to Tuskegee that year, and there were only eighteen in our class. My teacher and his wife took us to our dormitories. Then we went out to his friend's house who lived in Tuskegee and was on the faculty at the college. His family had dinner waiting for us. My teacher had told them about the other girl in our party, and they had made arrangements for her to stay with them. At least my dad had given me \$15.00. Her parents hadn't had that. She went to college with nothing. I gave her \$5.00 of my \$15.00 so she would have some money.

I went on back to campus and started to work at the college in the work-study program. That summer I worked in the laundry. Everybody else thought it was hard work, but it was not hard to me because the work that I had been doing was so far beyond it. I worked in the department where we were washing the community linen: sheets, towels. I was catching hot sheets and that was kind of difficult, not so much on my part, but it took two people to do the job, and the girl who worked with me was too slow. You had to move those sheets fast or you'd get really burned. One week I had blisters all over my fingers because I was trying to hold the sheets to give her time to catch her part of them. When I was working with the lady who was training us, it was okay because she was fast, and I wouldn't get those blisters. Anyway, I did that for two months at Tuskegee until they decided it was too hard for students and gave us other jobs. Some of us became maids in the hotel, but thanks to God my high school teacher's friend at Tuskegee helped me get a job working in the dormitory at the desk. I just couldn't believe that they would pay me for sitting at the desk answering the telephone.

They paid us in vouchers -- I never saw any money -- but I was able that way to save up enough money that summer to pay my tuition in September. So it was a privilege to work. We were only allowed to take nine hours of classes because we had to work. That's why it took me five years to get out of Tuskegee. I continued to work as a desk clerk in the dormitory, and I would babysit for people in the community. I started out babysitting for one family, and they were so impressed with me that they told another family about me. After a while I had more babysitting jobs than I could hardly hold down, but it was good for me because it allowed me to have a little money to buy the personal things that I really needed.

I had to work hard at college, harder than most of the other students, because I hadn't had the experience that they had had. When they came talking about the numbers of credit hours and all that they needed, I didn't know what they were talking about. I had never heard of credits. And that little country school that I had gone to didn't have a science lab. The year I graduated, they built a new school, but of course I didn't get to benefit from it. I was not prepared academically to compete with a lot of the students, but after being at college, I found that I could do okay.

When I got to Tuskegee, I met with a student counselor who was assigned to me. Student counselors told us about the classes we would take. They were assigned according to major. Later I met with my academic counselor. That's one reason I just thank God that I went to Tuskegee. If I had gone somewhere else, coming from where I came from, I would have been lost. I probably would have flunked out of school, which I almost did at Tuskegee, but I made it. If it had not been for people who really cared, I would not have made it. If I had been some place like Northwestern, I would have just had to go home because, there being such a large number of students there, people wouldn't have had a chance to listen to my story or they may not have been that concerned. College was like being in a foreign country, even at Tuskegee, but that is the college I was supposed to go to. By my teacher's introducing me to his friend who was also on the faculty, I had someone to talk to if I had any problems. So I had a mentor in the community as well as in the school. And my house mother was the mother of the couple who later became my god parents. When I got married and my godparents came, a friend of mine said, "I never heard of a grown person getting godparents before." I told her that I never went to a church where a minister said to me, "These are your

godparents.” But I say that they’re my godparents because I know that God put me there in front of them. These people took me into their home. My first year at Tuskegee, my friend lived with them. My second year there, I lived with them. They wanted me to come and live with them, and that was a blessing for me. I didn’t have any money, and I went through Tuskegee living at their house without having to pay them one nickel. In return, though, I took care of their four children.

They knew they could go anywhere and they could depend on me. I gave up a lot of games, movies, dances, anything, because I knew why I was there. I needed to work, so I stayed there and I wouldn’t allow anyone to come to that house when the parents weren’t there. I took care of those kids. Baseball, swimming, whatever they needed to do, I took them there. I read them their stories at night. I made sure they had their baths, I fixed their breakfast in the mornings. I did everything that I could do, and the parents knew that. Occasionally the grandmother would come by to check on me and the children when the parents were away, so I knew I could call on her if I ever needed to. But having grown up with eleven children, I knew what it was like taking care of kids, and I knew what to do. I was happy to have the entire family, and they were happy to have me. The parents gave me the key to their car. That’s why I say they are my godparents. They provided for me like they were my parents. So I had that side of my family by the time I graduated.

I grew up with my mother and father, and I grew up very poor. I went to Tuskegee and started living with these people who were upper middle class. You might remember Sargent Shriver who ran for Vice-President. That man was a guest in the house where I lived one night. I moved out of my room so he could sleep in my bed. I got to meet all calibers of

people. Except for leaving home to go to Tuskegee, I took my first trip out of the county with these people. I stayed in my first hotel; they took me to the Holiday Inn in Birmingham. He had a meeting up there one weekend and he called home that Friday evening, about twelve o'clock that night, and she said, "Y'all get up." She woke the kids up. I grabbed a bag, and we jumped in that station wagon and headed to Birmingham. Stayed the weekend. This was the kind of stuff I had read in the newspaper or heard people talk about. I had never thought I would be able to do those things. I was living in a different world.

When I first went to their home, I hardly knew what to do because I had not been accustomed to going in a room, a bathroom, to brush my teeth. I grew up going outside to use the toilet. I brushed my teeth standing on the back porch. Their whole life style, the living experience, was totally new to me. But the kids had to do chores and stuff, even though their father could give them anything. Like my dad, he made them do things. I was accustomed to working, and everything was just beautiful for me, all the way around.

I first got to know about other cultures through babysitting. The husband in the first family I babysat for was from Zimbabwe. I was exposed to African culture at their house. I got to eat African dishes. Their house was the first place I had ever eaten out of a silver spoon and at a table set with china. I had worked in some white people's houses near my home, but even the white people's houses didn't look like this one. And when I went in those white people's houses to work and they would give me a sandwich, I had to sit on the back porch to eat it. I was not allowed in their houses to eat. They would have a set table in their dining room, but they didn't have those cut glass crystal glasses and that china and silverware like these people had. And I could sit there with these people and eat and talk with them.

One day in my graduate class at Northeastern, the instructor went around the classroom asking the students who was the richest person that they knew about. Some said the DuPonts, some said the Waltons, some said the Kennedys. I don't know who the professor said it actually was, but I think it was the guy from Wal-Mart. The professor asked me last and I was glad because I said, "I'm the richest person I know. I had a mother and a father who loved me and took care of all my basic needs, and my father, God, is the maker of this whole world and everything that's in it, and richness depends on your definition of it. I know from whence I came and I know where I am, and I know it is by the grace of God."

I also know that the acceptance that I received from my godparents was part of my education. I am so glad I went to Tuskegee because during dinner conversations I learned about Booker T. Washington and his philosophy and how he helped people to live in this world with the things that God has provided them with. I think that he is one of the most misunderstood men of any time. People call him an Uncle Tom, and that's not true. He was interested in and dedicated to helping his people. I have the videotape with Tony Brown playing the part where Booker T. Washington was teaching the children to make the bricks and then build the building. Booker T. asked a kid where he was from. The kid said, "Dozier." Booker T. asked him, "Do you think the people of Dozier need to learn to speak French or to build a house?" The answer was, "To build a house." Being at the table with this family was to me an experiential avenue of my education that I could not get from a book. Getting to be around people from other parts of the world taught me that when you're with people of other cultures, you can adapt. And when I go back home with my family and get that fruit jar and that tin plate, I can adapt. I think that's what education is about. It's a

continuous process. It was at the table in Tuskegee that I first heard the word, apartheid, because the husband was part of the struggle. In fact, he was exiled from his country, but once the new government was created he went back, and they're down there now. Now, here was a man who was a leader from his country, and I was sitting with them. There is no way in the world George Wallace would have let me come into his house and talk about governmental things. While I would listen to them at dinner, I would ask questions. And the next day the wife would congratulate me on the questions that I had asked. I was learning a lot just by contributing to the conversation.

My formal education has been uneven. When I was in elementary school, in second grade, my teacher wasn't very good; eighth grade wasn't that effective. But within the context of the classroom, my teachers generally made learning possible. They motivated me to want to learn. When I went from elementary to high school, the children wanted to play a lot and I was angry because we'd be in the middle of math class and someone would raise their hand and say, "Can we go out to recess?" And I would want to just hit them in the head. I wanted to finish my math. Plus, I had to be in the field when I got home. We'd have four more minutes of class left, and I wanted to get all the work done that I could while I was there. I wanted so much to learn, to read, to write. When I was in third grade, my teacher exposed us to a lot of poetry and I began to write poems. In fact, they selected one of my poems for the school poem.

In the college classroom, some of the professors were exciting, and some were intimidating. I loved literature classes. The teachers were excited about their subjects and I wanted to learn all about children's books, to read every children's lit book I saw, to learn all

about the authors. On the other hand, I had a biology teacher from Hungary who had an accent. It was very difficult for me to understand her. I would be so frustrated and I'd go to her after class and try to explain what it was that I just didn't understand. She would try to explain, but we could hardly communicate. I was interested in the concepts that I picked up in the class, but I just didn't understand the teaching. I must say that the teacher was very nice.

I had trouble in math class. The teacher was very knowledgeable; he had written a math book. Nothing was wrong with his knowledge base or his ability to do math. But his teaching style and my learning style did not match. He'd tell me answers but wouldn't show me the process. He'd stand there and lecture, but that wasn't what I needed, coming from my background. When the teachers were involved with the material and let us have a lot of practical or hands on experience, I learned better. I would talk to other students to see if I could learn from them. I got a D from that math class, and I had loved math before. My grade wasn't because I couldn't understand math. I just didn't get the help that I needed from that teacher.

After I graduated from Tuskegee, I took a plane to Racine, Wisconsin, where I stayed with my aunt during June and July. That August I came to Waukegan and met with the school system's Director of Personnel. I got an apartment and started teaching in the Waukegan Public Schools.

This was an exciting time in my life. Both of my parents had come to my graduation from college. One time, my mother had come to Tuskegee for parents' day. That was the happiest day of my life to have my mother on that campus. There were all the other parents

there, and I had thought that my mother wouldn't be able to come because we didn't have a car and she'd never been able to go any place. My mother had been married at that time for thirty-five years and she had never gone anywhere except once. That was when they were still living in Alabama, and my oldest brother who was living in Florida got sick. My aunt in Florida let my parents know, and my mother got on the bus and went to Florida to be with him. She was there about a week or maybe two weeks. That was the first time she had ever left my dad for anything.

After I got a job teaching in Illinois, I kept after my mother to come visit me because I wanted to give her the opportunity for me to wait on her because my mother had always been busy. My mother came and stayed with me for a month. This was the third time she had left my dad in forty-two years, and I was just so privileged to have her with me that time. And she went back home in August, and she died the first day of October. I signed her death certificate on my birthday, October 6. It had been a pleasure for me to have her with me, and when my sister called and told me that she was dead, the first thing I said was, "Thank You, Jesus." And my roommate did not understand that. But I said, "Lord, I did everything I wanted to do with my mom." I took her to her first restaurant. I took her to her first movie. I took her to Chicago. I mean, I did so many things I wanted to do with her because I know where she came from and it had been so hard raising all of us and, after they moved to Florida, everybody else in the community.

My family moved to Florida because I went to college. When I went off to college in 1964, the white man who owned the plantation where we lived was so angry. He asked my dad how he could send me to college when his own daughter didn't go. He knew my dad

didn't have any money. My dad had not gone to him asking for any money. And the Ku Klux Klan harassed my family. There were times when my mom and dad and the children who were still at home would be in bed and they would hear gunshots and bullets sliding across the tin roof of the house.

So that day the plantation owner told my dad he had to move. My dad went out to another plantation to see if he could move there. They told him they didn't have any space. The plantation owner where we lived had gone around to every plantation around there and had told the owners that he was going to make my dad move and they should not let him move to their farms. And my dad had to go and find some other place to live. He went to a black family that had their own place, and they had a barn where they kept their corn and hay, and the man told my dad that that was all he had, but my family was welcome to it. My dad moved my mother and my two sisters and my two brothers who were still home at the time into that barn. They took the corn and stuff out, and that's where they lived until my older sister who was in Florida could get them a place to stay. My older sister and brother came and moved them to Florida. My folks had had to leave everything in the field and all their other farm produce because it "belonged" to the white man. They had had to leave the farm before it was time to settle with the owner for that year. They had left with nothing to show for a year's worth of work. You see, there were eleven of us. None of the others had gone to college. I wasn't supposed to go either, and by going I brought trouble on my family.

I didn't know about a lot of the trouble my family experienced when it was occurring. I found out most of the details in 1980, over twenty years after some of it happened. My mother died in 1981, my dad in 1985. I graduated from college in 1969. And my dad didn't

tell me what happened when I went to college until 1980. I am the richest person I know because my parents loved me so much that they didn't want me to experience college with all that trouble on my mind. I wouldn't have had the peace of mind to concentrate on trying to learn if I had known how they were being treated. So they kept it from me. I think now of the power they had to keep those people from stopping my education. At one time my dad had begun to drink heavily. My dad was a hard worker. He would work from Monday morning until Saturday evening. And on Saturday evening he would start drinking, and he would drink hard. Sometimes he wouldn't stop drinking until Sunday evening. Because, see, Monday morning he was going to be sober enough to go to work.

My father's drinking was his escape from a hard life. When I found out some of the things my dad had gone through with those people! There was one time when they threatened my dad. They wouldn't give my dad any money because he was running late getting the cotton in. I didn't learn about this until I was out of college and teaching. The white man threatened my dad because the cotton was not in on time *one time*, and my dad had to go to my uncle. My uncle took his children and they all came down to help my family pick that cotton. My uncle had his own farm. He was trying to get *his* cotton in, but he left his and came to help my dad because of what those people were going to do to my dad. My dad was coming close to being hanged by those people. But at the time, he wouldn't tell us about that.

I do things for people because I know I'm blessed. I just thank God every day because I know what I have. I see a lot of my mother in me. My mother was a giving person. And my dad would do anything to help anybody. When my dad used to kill hogs, he would give away a lot of meat, whole hams, to my uncles, and lots of meat to the people who help with the

slaughtering. He'd give corn, lots of it, to my uncle to feed his cows. One time when our cow was dry and we needed milk, my dad would buy milk from his brother. He gave fifty cents for milk and could hardly find a quarter to buy me a newspaper.

I also recall that when I was in college, only my aunt in Racine would send me something occasionally. None of the others helped me, but one of my uncles encouraged me. His church invited me to come and be their Youth Day speaker when I was in college. Then he called my father in Florida and told him how proud he was of me and that I had done a good job. That was in 1967.

I often think about people who have influenced me along the way. The teachers that I had in grade school and high school are still my motivators for my work now. I know how I was helped when I was a child, and I just know that children today need our help. I know I would not be where I am today without other people. I do the best that I can do in whatever I do, and I help whomever I can. My parents and my godparents are models. When my parents were living in Florida, people used to bring their children over and leave them for my mother to keep for free. There was one woman who wouldn't ask my mother to keep her three kids. She'd just bring them over to the yard on Friday and wouldn't come back until Sunday night. My mother would bathe them, feed them. She was sick -- low blood pressure and all -- but she said children can't help how their parents do. It was nothing for her to have six or seven children going to bed at her house at night.

Like my mother, I love children, and that is one of the reasons I am so glad that I became an elementary school teacher. I recall a little girl who was in my first class at Andrew Cooke School. Even in second grade, I used to tell her that she was going to go to Tuskegee

one day. I kind of followed her through her schooling. She would call me. When she graduated from high school, she went to Tuskegee. From the time she was seven years old, I told her she was going, and she went. She loved me. I felt good that I had been able to influence her in a positive way. I had a class of only fifteen children that year. I told an administrator the other day that if most educational leaders really knew the difference that small classes make, they'd make sure we had small classes. I was afraid that whole year that they were going to disband my class of fifteen children because it was small, but every child in that class has done something remarkable with their lives. One of my little girls was a sweet angel. I'd tell her she was going to be my nurse or my accountant because she was such a neat child with her work. Would you believe she became the secretary to the superintendent in a large school system? I would look at my children and, based on their strong assets, I would name professions for them. In that way, I could highlight their gifts and give them something to work toward. I told another child that he was going to be my lawyer because I could just see him being very vocal. He is in law school at Northwestern right now, about ready to graduate.

There are elderly people whom I like to help as much as I can. Mrs. Moody is a wonderful lady who took me on as her child. I used to date her nephew, but after we weren't going out anymore, she kind of kept me on. Another person I try to help is Mrs. Sadie Foster who is 87 years old. I go by to check on her. I try to talk with her every day. She is at the point where she doesn't walk, and I fix meals and take them to her. If she needs something, she thinks nothing of calling me to help her out. And I'm glad about that. She just walked into my life. We were having Homecoming at church and she walked up to me and said, "My

name is Sadie Foster and I'm going to be your mother and keep an eye on you." That was in 1980. I had started teaching Sunday school in 1979. When I had my surgery in 1982, she would visit me every day. My mother had died in 1981, and Mrs. Foster said, "Your mother is dead now, and I'm going to be your mother." I would drive her places, to shopping malls, etc. She looked upon me as her daughter because she never had daughters -- only a son. I am happy to help her whenever I can.

My life is enriched by my involvement in church, in teaching, in community service, in the National Association of University Women (NAUW), and in many other organizations that aim to advance education and to help others. I met my husband Chester through having someone come into the classroom to enhance education for children. Many of the children in my district are very poor, and their parents cannot provide certain educational enrichments for them, so it is important for the schools to do all that they can. We had been studying sand in my class, and I contacted this glass blower from Abbott Laboratories and had him come in to demonstrate for the children. I later married the glass blower whom I met in the classroom. I bring in various opportunities for students as often as I can. I also do classroom presentations for other teachers on my African travels and on other subjects in an effort to help children whenever I can.

The Bible tells us that we all have our gifts and our purposes here on Earth. In an NAUW meeting, my sister-in-law asked one time what we wanted our epitaphs to be. I said I want mine to be "Mary Swopes -- Of Service." God has given us two dates: our birth date, a dash, and a death date. That dash in between birth and death is our gift to Him. Mine is to help my fellow man in any way that I can. Because that's what Jesus did when He was here.

We have to serve each other if we are to serve Him. I never looked at it quite this way until now, but when I look back on my seventh grade classroom where I accepted my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I believe that's what I realized even then. I knew how my teacher was helping us and I, too, wanted to be of service. We got more from my teacher than reading, writing, and arithmetic. He gave us real service. I would like to do the same.

CHAPTER IV

LOOK WHAT I BRING TO YOU GOOD PEOPLE

Florence Dunham, 60, is a storyteller and social activist in Chicago, Illinois. I was first introduced to her by a Native-American student at the community college where I work. Florence was a presenter at an annual Native-American cultural event that the college was sponsoring, and her student host wanted her to meet me.

For me, the meeting was a fortuitous one. In a short while, Florence knew about my research study, and I knew that she was an activist as well as the first in the history of her family to earn a college degree, and that her daughter had become the first in their family to earn a master's degree. I learned of Florence's desire to continue educating herself and others about the cultures and traditions of the various Native-American nations and tribes. At the time, I did not share with Florence and her host my lifelong interest, stemming from my early childhood, in the American Indian. But as a child, I had often found arrowheads in our plowed fields, and in my mind's eye, I still imagine Indians on horseback crossing the expanse of our farm, from woods to woods, in silent and splendid pursuit of prey. Invariably, when I cross this nation's narrow waterways, I see their misty canoes and hear the noiseless sloshing of their oars.

I was born on the Six Nations Reserve which is near Brantford, in southwestern Ontario, in Canada. I was born into my tribe and into my clan through my mother's lineage. That's how it is with the Iroquois people. I'm a Mohawk, of the Mohawk Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy, and I am of the Bear Clan. Now, my grandmother raised me, and, unbelievable as it may seem, I didn't know until I grew up and had already been away from the reserve for several years that my grandmother was a clan mother of the Bear Clan. A clan mother is quite powerful. She chooses the chiefs, and if a chief does not perform to particular standards, he can be removed from his position by the clan mother. The clan mother is a leader of the clan, and a clan is like a family, so to speak, even though the members are not all brothers and sisters and there are diverse groups within the family or tribe within the nation.

When I lived on the reserve, I knew nothing of my grandmother's clan leadership even though she held such an exalted position. This was because of a particular dichotomy in my grandmother's spiritual beliefs and practices. The whole overt focus of my family, my entire upbringing, was based upon the Christian church. My grandmother, clan mother that she was, was a devoutly practicing Christian, so we went to church every Sunday, sometimes twice on Sunday, and we oftentimes attended a prayer meeting at night during the week. There was a tremendous emphasis on the church, so any traditional rituals in which my grandmother was involved were kept from me. Instead of the Indian spiritual ways, we were served a regular diet of the Bethany Bible Mission.

Closer to our home on the reserve was the Medinah Baptist Church where we often attended afternoon services. As if the magic of the church were not potent enough to banish

Indian beliefs, somewhere along the line somebody gave me the message -- I may have been sitting in the Medinah Baptist Church at the time -- that there were two kinds of Indians, the good ones who were Christians and the bad ones who practiced the traditional ways. Those of us who had converted to Christianity were assured somehow that our people who practiced traditional ways were pagans. Very early in my life I got the message that I must not associate with the pagans and that separation from them was not merely necessary but was also the Christian thing to do. Not surprisingly, I do not recall having any friends who followed the traditional ways when I was growing up. I may have had a few acquaintances at school who were from that group, but I was friends with none of them, and being a good Indian, I knew and was interested in nothing of substance about my culture.

I went to all eight grades of elementary school on the reserve. At the time there were thirteen schools, all one room schools, and there was an Indian teacher at each school. I think this must have been a plus for us. Here was a good role model who looked like us at the head of each classroom. When I graduated from eighth grade, I took the bus to a nearby town, Hagersville, for my high school education.

When I was attending school on the reserve, my teachers, even though they were Indian, taught me zero about my culture. They did not encourage me to study hard and go to college. In a word, they did not inspire me to aspire. In high school, there was no encouragement or inspiration from my teachers for me to become an educated person. In many respects, my teachers were as wooden as the carvings of Indians in headdress that once stood outside small town general stores. I can see my French teacher, Mr. Plum, whom I did not like, in my mind's eye. He was diminutive, and he had this thick black hair that was

constantly falling into his eyes. I knew he was alive because he was forever brushing his hair away from his face. For me he sparked no interest in his class at all. French meant almost nothing to me, but it was a mandatory subject. The only connection that Mr. Plum and his class had to my life occurred on those mornings when I woke up and my grandmother had decided that we would have cereal for breakfast. The cereal box would have everything written in English as well as in French. Otherwise, French provided nothing that I could use in my daily life. I did like Latin, however, and when I moved from Canada to the States, I remember that Miss Henry, the Latin teacher at my new high school, was quite impressed with my ability in Latin class. To this day, all I can remember in Latin is *Gallia est omnis in partes tres* which means “All Gaul is divided into three parts.” Ironically, nobody has ever asked me how many parts Gaul is divided into. In my entire experience in and out of school, with the exception of my high school Latin class, no one has asked what I know in Latin, and no one has cared.

Other courses that I took in school were also not particularly practical. When I was in high school in Ontario, I took something called agricultural science, a course designed to teach the students to become farmers on the reserve or farmers’ wives. We learned about corn smut, a disease of the corn. In my entire life outside that classroom, I have had no interaction with corn except that I appreciate it as a very, very prominent food for our people. That appreciation is something I learned after I left the reserve and after I was a grown woman.

At about my junior year in high school, a lot of my friends began quitting school to move to the States. Anything to do with the States was quite glamorous, especially the American cars that would often come over the border, sporting their New York license plates.

After one of my best friends quit school and moved to the States, she began coming home some weekends with new clothes. I thought I was missing out on life, being stuck there on the reserve. I didn't have anything concrete against school except its irrelevance. I was plodding along through the indistinguishable semesters, one after the other. My mother was remarried and lived in the States, at Michiana Shores in Indiana. On Thanksgiving of 1952, my mother and stepfather and my little sister came to visit us on the reserve. My mother invited me to move to the States to finish my high school education because only four years are required in the U.S. as opposed to the five forms in Canada. So I moved to the States when I was sixteen years old. I finished high school in Michigan City, Indiana, graduating in 1954. In 1955, I got married.

I got married during the June Cleaver era when the husband went to work and the wife stayed at home and raised the children. That's exactly what I did for years and years. The marriage deteriorated, and finally my husband and I were divorced in 1971. I didn't know what was before me. I didn't really have a clue about how to make a living. I simply did not know what to do. When I was married, my husband had allowed (I bristle at that word now) me to work part time in some cases around the Christmas season. So I had worked at Sears Roebuck, for example. But otherwise, I had no experience in the work world.

At the time, I was living in Downers Grove, a town that is southwest of Chicago. Somehow I managed to get a job with a real estate firm, Hogan and Falwell, on the twentieth floor of the World Trade Building in downtown Chicago. I commuted to Chicago on the Barrington Northwestern train. On my commute, I would think about the dreams that I had secretly held for myself when I was home raising my children. I would recall seeing two or

three people who lived on my block leave their homes early in the morning to commute to Chicago. They had jobs and offices. That had seemed so far, so distant from me. It had appeared glamorous and exciting to get dressed up and go to Chicago every morning on the train. I could not imagine at the time how that could ever take place in my life, but I thought a lot about how wonderful it would be if I could commute to Chicago and have an office. And it happened for me after my divorce when I went to work for Hogan and Falwell. Afterwards, I got the idea that it would be great to be transferred to another city and have an expense account. Eventually that happened for me, too. I changed jobs and trained for a year as a buyer of hats and wigs. Then my company transferred me to Omaha, Nebraska. When I made that change, I realized that for the first time in my life I was totally, independently Florence Dunham. You hear many women talk of no longer being simply the mother of, or the wife of, or the sister of, or the daughter of, as their identity. I came to realize that I existed, I *was*, in and of myself, for the first time in my life. I felt as if I had been reborn, not resurrected, for I was new! In a way, I had shed all old mantles and had emerged simply as myself. I had become the new but original Florence Dunham.

I think I can look to my mother as an influence in helping me to become independent. I can definitely look to my grandmother who was a very, very strong influence in my life. When you look at me today and you see me and what I am about, in large part you are seeing my grandmother. I share the values that my grandmother believed in. When I consider the role model in my life to go beyond what I was at the time, I can look to my mother, God rest her departed soul. She passed away in 1988. When she was a small child, she was sickly with asthma. She had it all her life, so as a child she missed a great deal of school. She left grade

school. I think she didn't attain higher than sixth grade. But what my mother accomplished was to me proof of what a woman can do when a man puts her down. I sort of choke up sometimes when I think of my mom. My mother told me that the last time she saw my father was when she was expecting me. He abandoned her when she was pregnant with his child. He made derogatory remarks to her, and he said, "You're not going to get anywhere. You're just going to be stuck here on the reserve with a whole bunch of kids. And when you ask your husband or your man for some money, he'll toss you a quarter." I think those words stayed with my mother all her life because she just achieved so much in her life that you wouldn't expect anyone to achieve if they dropped out of grade school. For example, she became the membership chairman for the Indiana State Board of the PTA. And when she took on that role, she was able to generate more members than anyone in that position had ever generated before. She would go out and speak at schools and to various community and civic groups. In the early sixties, the subject matter of her talks was called Indian lore. She also hosted a television program here in Chicago on Channel Eleven called Totem Club.

My mother's name was Marti Shock. I admired her tremendously, and I said to myself that one of these days I would like to have a show on Channel Eleven. I was able to accomplish that. It was not specifically my show for thirteen weeks, but in the spring of 1993, I co-hosted the Hot Line 21 show on Channel Twenty-one on cable television here in Chicago for Greenpeace. The way that happened was that Claude Rollins, who worked for Greenpeace, had asked me to be his guest on his show. We had a wonderful time. That next spring, he asked me to host the show with him. I just loved it. And the first show that I did was the best, I thought. I zeroed in on Native American environmental issues as well as the

First Nations People's environmental issues in Canada. I had Native American guests, one of whom was James Yellowbank, the Hochunk environmentalist and musician. My television show allowed me to educate others, and some Native Americans themselves, about the old ways of our people. I could share facts about how the Indians hunted, how they would kill only what they could use, how they would talk to the animals and thank them for providing food. Not long ago, I saw Pearl Sunrise, a Navajo weaver, and she talked about how the Indian hunter respects other life. When they say, "All my relatives," they mean all the trees, birds, every living thing. With the television show, I felt that I was doing what I had said to myself that I wanted to do. My mom was like that, too. She accomplished what she set her mind to do.

I never really met my father when I was a child, although I think I saw him once. All I can remember is looking up at this man. But my father's mother was always very, very loving towards me whenever she would encounter me at events on the reserve, and she was forever asking me to come and visit with her. I myself chose not to get involved with my father's side of the family. I felt a separation from them, and when my mother would speak of my father, she certainly did not use any glowing words to describe him.

My father comes from quite a large family. One of his brothers changed his name to Jay Silverheels and for quite a number of years was playing the role of Tonto on the television show, *The Lone Ranger*. His real name is Harry Smith. It seems like there were about twelve children in my father's family. In the middle sixties, I was invited to a reunion on my father's side of the family in Depew, New York. I went with my husband and my two children. Another dream I used to have was that I would grow up and have a handsome husband and

precious little children. My husband was very handsome, and the reunion was the first time that I really remember meeting my father. His latest wife was there. She is three months older than I am. And there were all these children. They were all from California. Three were from his first wife who was deceased, and five were from the last wife. A few years later, my paternal grandmother passed away, and my daughter and I went to the funeral. My father literally took me by the elbow and proudly introduced me as his daughter to all these people. My grandmother raised me to be gracious, so I was gracious through the whole thing. But when one of my uncles said to me, "Well, we didn't know about you," I said, "Don't look at me. Look at your brother." At this late date, my father had apparently become quite proud of me. I hadn't even begun to do that which would really single me out; I hadn't even thought about enrolling in college.

Here's what happened that I came to go to college. After my divorce, I had been working as a receptionist for a real estate company for a couple of years when they began to lay people off. I was laid off. Eventually I got into a training program to be a buyer/manager for a two state (Nebraska and Iowa) fashion operation of hats and wigs. The company was based in Chicago, and when they changed district managers, the new manager hired me to work in the Oak Park and Norridge stores while a woman was on maternity leave. She decided not to leave, so I was out of a job. One of my friends, a Hochunk named Willard Lumier with whom I had worked over a number of years for a national Indian organization, advised me as to what I should do next. Willard was director of the Native American Center in Chicago. I had tried the fashion industry, and it had been exciting and glamorous. It had given me ways to be Florence, totally and completely Florence. I needed something else with

substance to it. Willard suggested that I consider enrolling in NAES College, the Native American Educational Services College in Chicago. NAES had opened its doors in 1975. It is a reservation/urban learning kind of a college, and there are campuses in Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Fort Peck, Montana, where the Cinnewanen Sioux are. So I met with the president of the college and enrolled. NAES granted credits for prior learning. One could also gain credits for professional development in a particular field. This was very attractive to me. The program could save me time and money. Even more important, it provided an implicit validation of what I am and what I brought to the college and to the world just by virtue of what my experiences had been.

In addition to studying hard and taking a full load of classes, I got started in a job that would help toward my degree in community development. I started out as a development officer with Wright College. In this capacity, I went out and met with people like Medin Van San. I made various contacts with people in Chicago as part of a fund raising campaign. At the time, NAES was trying to get accredited, so when I received my degree in April of 1981, it was awarded by Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio. NAES had a bilateral agreement with Antioch, an accredited institution, through which we were granted our degrees.

College seemed the thing for me to do because I realized that I would need credentials in order to grow. At NAES, classes were very small. A lot of individual attention was given to the students. We felt like a family. I kept in close touch with Willard Lumier and joined with all the other students to form an informal support group. We had much in common with each other. Many of us were single heads of households. Some of us were divorced. An

example was Joan Takahara, a Sioux from the Dakotas, who was a divorced, returning student. She impressed me with how disciplined she was. From my desk where I worked at the college, I would hear Joan's distinct steps as she would come up the stairs and go down the hall to see the college officials. She worked in a factory and was very, very structured and disciplined. Being exposed to Joan's self-motivation had a profound effect on me.

The instructors at NAES were very approachable and accessible -- almost like our peers -- so there was a comfort in the classroom experience. I felt perfectly comfortable in raising any kinds of questions. My thoughts and concerns were all respectfully received. I did not feel intimidated or that I should suppress any ideas or questions that I might have. This was so different from my education in Canada, in the one room schools, where I had been taught by Graham Smith and Reggie Hill, who had taught my mother before me. I do not recall any time that any teacher, prior to my experience at NAES, inspired me or any other Indian student or told us to go on to higher education. And neither in the one room schools nor in the high school did anyone ever instruct us in the traditional ways of the Native American people.

At NAES, we studied in depth the history of Native Americans. Often experts in particular areas would come from various parts of the country to provide insight into what we were studying. I remember that we had a religious leader come in to teach during a course on contemporary Indian religious issues. Someone came from the southwest to teach about tribal government. Native American languages such as Navajo and Ojibwa (or Chippewa) are taught at NAES. Mohawk is not taught, but there are more Ojibwa and Navajo people here in Chicago than there are Mohawk. There are relatively few Mohawk here. And learning

about other Native American peoples actually compels me to learn more about the Mohawk and the other Iroquois people. I was proud to learn that the U.S. government itself is based on the government of the Iroquois Confederacy which goes back hundreds of years. There was an occasion when the white scholars got together with the Indians to figure out when the Iroquois Confederacy was formed. The Indians said the date was 1390. When the meeting ended, the white scholars said it was 1500. The powers that be ignore history and write their own.

After NAES College, some of my classmates went on to get their master's degrees. For example, Joan Takahara didn't miss a beat. When she received her bachelor's degree in 1981, she had already made arrangements to go on to the University of California at Berkeley. In two years, she had earned her M.A. in public health. I decided to take a break from school for a while and accepted a job in Chicago as the Executive Director of the Native American Committee. The whole mission of NAES College was to get credentialed leadership on the reserves and in urban settings, so my job was just following through on what I had studied for. I gave myself a five year time frame in which to get my M.A. Five years have come and gone, and I'm sitting here in 1996 and I haven't done anything to realize that goal. What happened is that in 1983, a couple of years after I got my B.A., my mom became suddenly ill, so I moved to Indiana and took care of her until 1986. I was maintaining a full time job in Chicago during all that time. In 1986, my mother went to live with my sister. My mother passed on in 1988.

NAES was a focal field in my life for my becoming aware of other Indian nations, cultures, and traditions. At NAES, I would hear about the boarding schools in the States and

in Canada. Someone said the children would go in those boarding schools innocent and pure of heart and would leave broken in spirit. I could reach out and touch my best friend, Joan Takahara, who had gone to a boarding school when she was four years old. She could share with me how she became very ill. It seems to her to have been around Christmas time. People in charge of the school put her in a room that was dark, and it seems to her that she was still there that Easter. By then she was all drawn up and could hardly move. And a priest came in and bodily picked her up and moved her from that place. These kinds of exposures to real life experiences that people had and that are part of our history became part of my curriculum when I was in college. The knowledge that I received from my colleagues was as great as -- it enriched and corroborated -- what I learned in the classroom.

The same was true of my learning about the traditional ways of Native American people. I remember going to a powwow with my friend Joan Takahara, and she had her two sons and her daughter with her. She had her youngest child, her daughter, in the traditional outfit of Joan's tribe with her hair done in the particular way that her hair should have been done. Even though Joan had been sent off to a boarding school at an early age, somehow the powers that were -- the schools, the government, and the churches -- somehow they weren't able to take her heritage away from her. And Joan, without the cultural assistance of her ex-husband who was Japanese, was passing that heritage on to her children.

The transmission of heritage is immensely important, for just as it helps to form the self-identification of a child, it simultaneously helps to preserve the identity of a people. For these reasons, quite often at the American Indian Center in Chicago, powwows are held so that Indian people can get together, regardless of what tribe or organization they are from.

In the American Indian Center's history, it has been a major struggle over the years just to maintain the heart of the Indian community here in Chicago. It is a struggle! Funding wise, the building they're in, it's a drain. So people need to come together and powwow. I never went to a powwow when I was on the reserve in Canada. We were separate from the people who practiced the traditional ways. When I was in college, I learned about taking part in powwows and eventually thinking, "I'll be darned! That's the grass dance! I know that! Heavenly days! I know this! I know that!" It was quite a springboard for me just to begin to realize that in spite of the fact that Native Americans were torn from our reserves in some cases. . . . In the case of my friend Joan, who is multiplied by thousands of cases. . . . What I want to say is that Native Americans were torn from their families but were still able to maintain our link, our strong spiritual link, to the traditional ways. So I've been trying to learn what I can about the traditional ways, and I'm not being true to myself because I know I'm not learning every day as much as I possibly could be learning about our people.

In terms of learning about Native American people, I have no time to lose because during so much of my life, I learned practically nothing. When I was growing up, my grandmother and grandfather spoke Mohawk and Oneida. They were fluent, but they did not teach those languages to us. When little Native American children were torn away from their parents and sent to the government run boarding schools, they were literally beaten when they spoke the language of their people. There is a very moving, haunting film called *Where the Spirit Lives* that tells the stories of these children. I have met many Indians who said that their parents tried to protect them by not teaching them their native language.

As has been true in so much of my life, luck has played a strong role in what I have

been able to learn and do. Indeed, much of the information that I have learned has come to me in serendipitous ways. For instance, in a recent year -- maybe in 1992 -- my daughter and I went to another family reunion. My father's family had had reunions every year. During the spring, prior to going to that reunion in August, I had read in *The United Tribe*, a newspaper from near Green Bay, Wisconsin, about this man, Jacob Thomas, the chief of the Cayuga tribe. He was going to be at the Unida Tribes conference, and he was going to be presenting the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois people. It would be a five day conference, all in English. The reputation of the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois, which was brought to inspire the peace maker so we would stop warring with each other, is legendary. But it just was not possible for me to attend the conference. I wanted so much to learn about the Great Law of Peace! When I was at the family reunion in August, I happened to walk down to the river. Our reunion was held at Chieftain Park on our reserve, and I just walked down by the water to be by myself for a while. As I was walking along the river, one of my cousins caught up with me and started talking about the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois! When I was ready to leave the next day, he gave me fourteen tapes of the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois recited by Chief Jacob Thomas! So sometimes very important things have come to me in this way. Getting the tapes was so beneficial to me because it is important to hear the Great law of Peace recited again and again. Even though I can listen to the tapes over and over, there is just so much to learn! Then I'll read a book, for example, *White Roots of Peace* that I'm reading right now. I'll see how I can somehow tie together all that I am learning. Even though I know that I am really learning a lot, I also know that I have just begun to scratch the surface. The opportunity to learn about the Great Law of Peace was a stroke of

major good fortune. My desire to learn and the way to learn magically found each other.

Here's how I became a storyteller. When I was a small child, my grandmother and I used to take the train to and from Chicago to visit my mother. This led to my becoming a storyteller without realizing that that was what I was doing. After returning from one of our visits, I went over to my friend Mary Henhock's house, and I started talking about my trip to Chicago on the train. Mary's family were falling apart at what I was saying. My story was funny to them. I was talking about the dress I wore, too long on me, plaid with mostly yellow and blue checks. My grandmother had pinned it up at the waist with straight pins, and I had on these jet black stockings and string up oxfords that my grandmother had bought me. And then I had on this long checked coat, too big on me, that one of my aunts had given my grandmother and she had had cut down for me to grow into. And on top of my head of braids I had this robin's egg blue hat. I told of going down the aisle of the train and of how my stockings started to bunch up, so they were sagging around my skinny legs. These were sexy, jet black, see through stockings. I don't know why Grandma had bought those things! And then the pins from my dress started coming lose, and my dress started falling down. I was just telling them my experience, and they thought it was the funniest thing in the world!

Obviously, I had other sources and outlets for stories. When I was a child on the reserve, my grandmother and grandfather were very involved in community activities. My grandfather was president of the Plowman's Association. My grandmother was involved in the Women's Institute, and I would go to a lot of events with them. One evening a lady and her husband had a social gathering, and I attended with my grandparents. At that time, everyone used kerosene lamps because there was no electricity on our part of the reserve. So

the kerosene lamps were lit and people arrived for the social evening. One of the customs was that different people would get up and tell a story, sing a song, or play a game. The events would take the form of a contest. The person doing the best would get a prize. And I won the prize that night for telling a story. I won a maroon, stuffed, toss pillow. All I remember about my story is that the punch line was something like, "The capital city of Siberia!" I remember that I delivered the line and sat down, and the people just cracked up.

I noticed, too, that quite often when my mother and I would drive up to Canada after I moved to the States as a teenager, when we would talk about our trip to others, what we said was always a story. For example, one time when we were driving up to Canada -- we were in Michigan somewhere -- I had fallen asleep. My mother shook me awake and said excitedly, "Florence, look what's just up the highway!" Somewhat awake, I looked at all these lights hovering in the darkness ahead of us just above the road, and I said, "Looks like a big ole flying saucer, flying mighty low," and I went right back to sleep. The lights turned out to be on a large truck, but I wasn't awake long enough to discover that fact for myself. Even though people liked being regaled with accounts of our experiences, our life events were not necessarily more exciting than anyone else's. It was simply that our adventures seemed noteworthy when we talked about them.

My son Dean was more or less responsible for my beginning to tell stories in schools. Dean is half Mohawk and half Irish/English. When he was a little boy and his class would talk about Indians at Thanksgiving, the teacher reported that Dean would raise his little hand and say, "I'm a Mohawk!" and the teacher would say, "Yeah, we know. . . ." And Dean would be waving his little hand. But eventually she met me, and then she could believe him. I began

speaking in schools about stories of my childhood so that children and their teachers could learn whatever I could offer about Native American people. They could come to understand that some Indians, such as my son, might not look exactly the way that some people think Indians should look. Over the years, talks about my childhood have just naturally expanded to some of the other things that I have learned. I began to incorporate the creation story of the Iroquois people. My stories grew and grew. During this past summer, I was at the Field Museum telling stories over a weekend in July and a Saturday in August. While my stories focus more on Iroquois tales, I made use of my varied body of material, telling stories from the Iroquois nation as well as from other tribes.

As I look over my life, I conclude that I have always been a storyteller, and it has brought me joy in all my life phases. As a married woman, I just repeated the pattern of my childhood, and I went to church every Sunday. On Sunday afternoons, many times we would have pot luck at church. On Sunday night and Wednesday evening, we would have prayer service. But I would teach Sunday school quite often, and that included storytelling. One year during vacation Bible school, I recall being very involved in telling the story of Zacchaeus, a teeny, tiny little man who desperately wanted to see Jesus when He passed by. When Jesus comes along, Zacchaeus is too short to see Him through the crowds, so Zacchaeus climbs into a tree. And I'm on top of the chair because I'm Zacchaeus as I'm telling the story. Jesus comes along and says, "Zacchaeus, will you come down?" I remember a wide-eyed little kid named Ronnie who said to me, after he figured out I wasn't really Zacchaeus, "Mrs. Dunham, You tell the best stories!"

Storytelling, a major force in my activist work, brings me absolute joy. I do it naturally

and everybody of all ages responds in kind, with joy. I tell my stories, I sing in Mohawk. And afterward, people come and talk to me. The little kids want to tell me their stories and what they have read. I try to make my experience and what I have learned real for my audience. I like to invite them in to the experience. And I try to keep learning, to keep getting better.

I am currently learning the peace song, but I don't know it that well. I'm also learning another song, but here is something that I've been singing since I was a little girl. Whenever I sing this song, I dedicate it to my grandmother, Flossy Martin: *(Florence sings in her exquisite contralto an eerily beautiful song that is in almost the same tune as "Amazing Grace." The first two lines sound like: Jah kah to gee me son gwah way / Ming yon gway day yo sway. . . .)*

When I was growing up on the reserve, we would sing our hymns in Indian and in English, particularly at the Medinah Baptist Church. Since there were six tribes on my reserve, some of the people would get up and speak and sing in their language. I remember Mr. Howard Beale would sometimes sing and pray and speak in Tuscarora. I do not speak any of the Iroquois languages, but when I sing that song for my grandmother, I like to imagine that I am singing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green. He leadeth me the quiet waters by."

Here's how I learned what the song really means. I was at this conference in Canada, at the Worthington Cultural Center, and there were a number of Mohawks there from the Tannedenega Reserve in Ontario. I met a young man named David Miracle. And what I wanted to know was, was this song I sang Oneida or was it Mohawk because the two languages are very, very similar. I had asked an Oneida man, and he had said it sounded

Oneida, but some words I wasn't saying exactly the way the Oneidas said them. David Miracle began speaking to me in Mohawk when I told him I wanted to learn the language. I reminded him I didn't already speak Mohawk, so he said in English, "Okay. What is your Indian name?" I didn't even have an Indian name, so he gave me one right there on the spot. Then I sang that song to him and asked him to translate it for me. He said that it is Mohawk and that it means, "Look what I bring to you good people, your good hearts and your good minds." And, you see, that's what the peacemaker brought to us hundreds and hundreds of years ago. He brought that to all the Iroquois people, all of us various tribes -- the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondagas, the Cayuga, the Seneca, and later on the Tuscarora. He brought this to us in order that we would have good minds and would love one another. That's what *everything* is all about. All people need to learn that *now*. And I can see clearly now that David Miracle valued immediacy in learning.

When my grandmother passed away in 1963 at the age of seventy-five, my auntie Elma became the Clan Mother of the Bear Clan of the Mohawk tribe because she was the oldest daughter. She focused on the Christian church but maintained her clan mother duties somehow, just as my grandmother had. In October of 1978, she invited me to go with her to a meeting of all the clan mothers and the chiefs of the Mohawk tribe. I went but it was 1978 and I had a burgundy leather coat and a yellow Camaro, and I wasn't really that interested. I didn't get the full impact of what I was experiencing -- out of my own ignorance. Yet, my journey of awakening, though deeply buried beneath consciousness, was underway.

How deeply buried has my consciousness and acknowledgment of my heritage been? When I participated in storytelling at the Newberry Library on February 3 of this year, my

daughter Delores was in the audience with her guest who had just flown in from Houston, Texas. I told the Iroquois creation story and a story from my childhood about my grandfather. Then I went to meet my daughter's friend. Delores had told her friend that I never had told her those stories when she was growing up. I said, "Well, Delores, I was too busy reading you *Charlotte's Web*." A few weeks ago, Delores was at my house for dinner. She was standing by the sink as I was making last minute preparations. She said, "Mom, you know the story you told about your grandfather? Was it true?"

I am grateful to my grandparents, my mother, and to others who have helped me along the way. I want to give to others as much as I can. My friend Bea Chevalier, a Menominee, has been involved in the Chicago Native American community for quite a number of years. She credits me with having recruited her to NAES College. At the time, I was a development officer, but I did other things, too. I would recruit students. I would call the Executive Directors of Native American organizations and ask them to let me speak to their staffs about NAES. I would promise to take only twenty or thirty minutes of their time. I would keep my talk simple. I would tell them about myself, about being divorced in 1971 with no clue about what to do, how to write a check, how to use a checkbook, how to go about getting a decent job. I would tell them about how my children had been in their early teens, and how I came to realize that in order to meet my responsibilities and fulfill my dreams, I needed credentials. Bea Chevalier related to me because she was single, the head of a household, and in need of direction and credentials.

I have known the importance of helping others all my life. In Omaha, when I was in the hats and wigs business, I happened to go to an event at the Indian Center there. A lady

asked if I would let her little girl spend a day with me at my office. When I was assigned to my job, I had replaced a Caucasian man. He had asked my district manager if I were a Jew. She had said no, that I was a Native American. He had refused to believe that I was an American Indian *and* a woman. He reconciled that by saying, “She must be half white,” because I was taking his place. I was glad to have that little Indian girl, ten or eleven years old, come and spend the day at work with me. Her mother wanted her to see that I represented a possibility for her. This was “Take a Child to Work” before anyone had ever heard of it.

In my life, I try to learn, and I try to share with others what I know. I know that peace, love, and understanding start right here, with me. If I feel a sense of joy, of love, and I walk into a school and I smile, people smile back because they’re happy. What kind of experience do I want today? What I project is the kind of experience that I can have. Of course, when we look at television or in the newspaper, when we listen to the radio and do whatever we do over the Internet, it seems that there is so much to be on guard about. *The Chicago Tribune* columnist Bob Greene’s column recently was about a party where people had to be patted down to make sure they were not a danger and where purses and other valuables were being stolen. If people from years ago could see this, they would say, “This is a party?” But we don’t have to buy into such craziness and let it control our lives. Now, we go through security checks to get on airplanes, and we understand that and its purpose. But we ourselves know that we are about peace and love, and we just project that.

Listen. . . . Hadioga was a storyteller that would go from village to village a long time ago telling stories at night and during winter between the first and last frost. The

grandmothers and grandfathers would be there, and he would find a way of engaging their interest so they wouldn't fall asleep on him. Once he kept them awake by telling them the Iroquois creation story, "Earth on Turtle's Back." I can tell you an abbreviation of the story about how we came to be.

Listen. . . . Before everything happened, when the Sky Woman came down from the Sky Land, there was nothing but water as far as the eye could see. Animals and birds were swimming on the water. There was just water. Then Sky Woman fell through a hole in the sky and came down. As she was falling downward, the animals saw her and realized that she didn't have webbed feet and couldn't live in the water. So they got together to plan what to do in order to help her. A couple of swans flew up to break her fall, and they were gently bringing her toward the water. Each animal tried to go down, way down deep in the water because they had heard that way down deep there was earth. And if one of them could go down far enough and bring up some earth, then Sky Woman would have something to stand on, and she could live. So all the animals tried valiantly. The duck tried. Then the beaver. The loon tried, and they all failed. And finally, after all the other animals had given up, the tiny little muskrat tried. And she went down and down, and even when it got dark and darker, she kept going down. And when she thought her lungs were going to burst, she still kept going. She almost fell unconscious, and she still kept going down and down. And then she reached the bottom, scooped up a little paw of earth, and floated back to the surface. Everyone rejoiced, for she had succeeded in bringing earth up to the surface. But she had to put it somewhere. But where? That's when the great turtle offered that Muskrat put the earth on his back. As soon as Muskrat had done so, Great Turtle's back became larger and larger and

larger, as large as Muskrat's endurance and love, as large as his own generous spirit, as large as the compassion of the other animals, until it became the whole world. The swans brought Sky Woman gently to the ground, and she stepped down on earth. When she had fallen through the hole in the sky, Sky Woman had brought seeds from Sky Land in her hands. The seeds scattered upon the earth, and the grasses and trees began to grow.

CHAPTER V

PICASSO'S PRINCIPLE

Jim Harrington, 52, is an artist and social activist in Waukegan, Illinois. I first read about him in The Chicago Tribune and in The News Sun where he was featured at least a couple of times. Having lived in Waukegan many years ago, I was familiar with most of the areas that the newspapers reported as having been positively affected by his activism, the populations that he served, and the need for an uplifting impact upon the city. I discovered that I knew artists who had rented studio space from Jim, and I had an enduring fondness for the old Carnegie Library building which he had saved from demolition. As if that were not enough to recommend Jim for my study, I was very interested in a man who could and did bring Ray Bradbury back to Waukegan, his home town, lending to the people a great joy and excitement, an increased appreciation of their city's ravines, an emphasis upon reading and childhood, a heightened awareness of the electricity of autumn, and the knowledge that if you organize, you can fight city hall.

Here is Jim's story.

I was a victim of divorce early, so early I don't even remember it, during World War II. My father married again, again way too young, so a problem developed in that marriage,

too. I never got to know my biological mother until I was a teenager. I was at a ball field and these two ladies were there. "Jimmy, come 'ere! David, come 'ere!" David is my older brother. And I got to meet my mom. What a shock! She had married a Pepsi Cola bottler in northern California, and I started going to see her in the summer and had a heck of a nice time. They had built a little resort near Mt. Lassen, forty-four miles east of Redding, and it was beautiful. There was a hotel, a gas station, the house overlooking a creek, horses, and all that stuff. I could just romp around and get to know my mom. She was a drinker. She died when she was forty-two and I was twenty-one.

I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana. When I was a year old and my brother was four and a half, my father married Edith Kathleen Miller, a woman from Hicksville, Ohio. They're still married. I call Katy Mom. She always tended to the house. Never worked, except when I was nine or ten years old and she worked during the Christmas season, gift wrapping, to pick up a little something extra for Christmas. My father's name is Don. He started off as a factory worker and became a good machinist. He was an only son -- a little bit spoiled -- who was always interested in labor unions. He finally got elected to a union position when I was eight. We moved to California and, after a few moves around the state, settled in San Diego. We bought a house, and that's where I grew up.

Even though my father really wanted the union job that he had gotten, it didn't work out that well for us. The job was very destructive for him and hard on the whole family. I know I grew up angry and sullen over it. It was my father's freewheeling lifestyle -- driving around instead of going to work, coming up with a mistress, that type of thing -- that was so threatening. I got after him about it, telling him that I wouldn't stand for it. I must have been

somewhat effective because he and Katy stayed together.

Years passed and my dad lost his election and probably his job in San Diego. Then they moved to Fremont, in the San Francisco Bay area. My father worked the rest of his life for Lockheed, serving in a low keyed capacity as union steward and as a machinist. That was a good job. Finally, they relocated in retirement to a little town called Paradise, California, near Reno.

I grew up by my own devices, pretty much on my own. My mom and dad sort of let me go. Whatever I did was okay. It was as if they forgot about me. Of course, there was discipline set, there were rules and stuff. But they never really paid much attention to me, and I was able to roam the hillsides with my bow and arrow when I was a kid. San Diego was like a sleepy Spanish town of about 150 or 200 thousand people in those days. We moved to a new area called Clairemont that overlooked Mission Bay. I loved it because you could see the ocean which was five miles away. I could just be a boy. I don't think kids in a town like Waukegan can be that way these days.

No one paid much attention to my schooling when I was growing up. I didn't get any message from anyone to go to school beyond twelfth grade. To finish high school, my parents said, was fine. "Get yourself a trade," was the strong message I got at home. At school there was no message at all. I just went through the grades. In the last year of high school, I had a girlfriend, Nancy, but I went ahead and left home after graduation. I wanted to be an architect, and I went to Berkeley to follow that dream. I had been studying architecture through high school under the guise that it was a trade. And I started working for this architect, Richard George Wheeler, as an apprentice. After a year or so, I looked at the guys

in the office and saw that they looked miserable. Their advice was, "Jim, you don't want to do this. Look at us! We've got ulcers! Go be a plumber or something. Go be happy." So I did a little of both. I stayed with my art work, and I took up a trade.

I learned how to lay linoleum and carpeting and did that part time, in the evenings and on weekends. I didn't have any financial support from my parents or a scholarship or anything, so I worked for a year and saved. Then I got myself accepted at the University of California at Berkeley. At that time, Reagan was governor of California, and there was a lot of upheaval going on with the anti-Vietnam War movement. It was a really, really bad scene. The degree of upheaval made it very hard to get an education. In fact, during that time on Friday afternoons the authorities would have all these paddy wagons roam the streets and round up the students as they were walking home from classes. They would take the kids from Berkeley to Sacramento. There was a huge concrete slab that they had built in Sacramento about half the size of downtown Waukegan. All the students would have to spend the weekend on that concrete slab. The accommodations were a few portable toilets. Then early, early Monday morning, around three-thirty or four o'clock, they'd put the students back on the bus and send them on back to school. That was Reagan's answer to the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. He rounded kids up like that for seven or eight months. I got caught a couple of times when I was just walking. Our classes became disrupted to the point that they were sometimes held out on Haight Ashbury. Classes would meet on the lawn, in the park.

That's how I got to meet some of the kids who were really involved in the anti war movement. I met this guy named Steve Gaskin, from San Francisco State, who became the

head of the commune, the Farm, where I hooked up with him again years later. I really didn't want a lot to do with the war protest movement. I was studying cultural anthropology and art and just wanted to focus on my courses. I left that place. I dropped out of school and went to San Miguel Allende in Mexico, a hundred miles northeast of Mexico City. I spent a semester there. There were all these people from England, what you'd call beatniks, in San Miguel. They were terrific writers. I never got to meet Malcolm Lowry or anybody of his stature, but it was a cool art school, very good for weaving, pottery, sculpture, painting. It got me going again. I didn't have to be a Vietnam demonstrator just because I was of a particular age. And here were all these people who knew what they were doing with their lives. They were really dedicated artists who had given up everything to be themselves and to move forward with becoming the best artists they could be.

I moved forward by going back to San Diego and finishing my degree at San Diego State. I thought I was going to get a master's degree, so I went to New York to the Art League for a semester. I'd heard that the Art League would work you to death and really give you some great disciplines, and I wanted that. I wanted to just get over the edge because schools never really tell you how to be a professional, how to make a living at art, but just that art is something that culture and society need. The Art League did give me some good disciplines. I took a hard semester there living in the Village. I got to meet some interesting people, then I stayed for a couple of years upstate in Syracuse where I thought I might get a master's degree.

The master's degree course work was too often boring. All you had to do was memorize all the artists in the museums and their histories, and you'd get your master's. I

realize now that there is a real value to that. I'm painting every day using knowledge and techniques that artists long ago learned over the centuries. They may have spent their whole lives and may have come up with just one thing, but that one thing has lived through the ages. For instance, when I was in college, I started shading my pieces so that on one side you'll see a little blue streak or hue and on the other side you'll see a little orange or red. Up against an object, this technique gives a real presence of atmosphere. I probably wouldn't have learned that in a lifetime if some professor hadn't come in and said, "Jim, Rodin did this God knows how many years ago. Go ahead and try it." So in that respect, I probably would have been better off studying some of the masters a little closer, but I didn't. I just pursued my own path, and it's really pretty hard. I've had a hard life.

Sometimes my professors did other things that I found kind of life changing. I remember one time Syracuse had a workshop up in Blue Mountain Lake, above Utica. The whole workshop was on aesthetic ambiguities, and I was totally intrigued. In terms of art attitudes, I would call myself a sophomore at that time, and the workshop allowed me to share a mature environment with a number of professors from Syracuse and Montreal. These professors somehow gave me a lot more freedom to experiment. Using glass in my paintings is the result of one of my experiments. I try to do just pure experimentation at least six to eight weeks a year. Much of that practice came from my experience at the Syracuse workshops. Collecting data. Having fun. Trying to reach my limits, to stretch. These habits are legacies, I think, of my art education.

When I went off to college, my parents didn't encourage me at all. They just continued their consistent practice throughout my youth of leaving me alone. In stark contrast

to the way they treated me, they picked on my brother David a lot. Ironically, they had high expectations of him academically and otherwise, and he is the one who was born seven months into the pregnancy and was always a little bit slow. In fact, I had to defend my brother. One of my biggest problems in life has been coming to his defense and becoming what they call an appeaser or a placater. I was always telling lies for him -- "I did it! David didn't do this, I did!" -- knowing that I wouldn't get a really severe beating for it but he might. Those lies have stayed with me all through my life. It has been somewhat like rescuing somebody over and over again, somebody that shouldn't be rescued. Maybe I shouldn't have lied to help David. Maybe my intervention restricted his ability to have a life of his own. But I was not prepared to tolerate his suffering. Still, the kind of appeasement that I did for David weighs heavily upon me.

Our parents left me alone and sent David to the navy. When David became a recluse later in life, perhaps no one should have been surprised. He was functioning relatively normally until he was about thirty or thirty-five, and then he became a recluse. I write him twice a year, but I have never gotten a response even though we are good friends. We don't have problems together; it's he and my dad who never got along. So David just said, "Well, I won't have any contact with any of the family anymore," and went off to work at a winery in northern California. I don't like the idea that he doesn't even give me a Christmas card.

I helped myself to go to college and to do the things that I have done. No one else helped me. No one guided or encouraged me. In my life, I guess you could say that I have been successful at deriving my inspiration and drive from the actual freedom to pursue becoming myself, but every once in a while I get really tired. Trying to live a life of social

service sometimes gets me so tired that I have to switch gears. For instance, I taught for just one year in Downer's Grove at a little private school called DuPage Community School. There were only twelve students. The school was only two blocks from my home, a little house on a dead end street. The students would come over to my house instead of going to school. They were fairly gifted, very challenging, and I put so much into teaching them! They seemed always to be with me, and I did wind up fostering one of them, a girl whose mother had a drinking problem. I had my own daughter in high school, so fostering this girl worked out really well. It was hard on me, though, because my house was like a hotel with all of those kids around. They called it Harrington's Hotel. I even heard it referred to that way on the radio once! I tried so hard to connect with and sustain those students! I would promise them that if they really loved art and worked really hard, I would get them into the Art Institute, unrealistic stuff like that, and it was too hard a job for me. So I sold everything I had and went to that famous hippie commune in Tennessee, the Farm.

There were 1,500 people at the Farm that I had gone to school with in California. They specialized in midwifery and published a very good book of some renown, *Spiritual Midwifery*. They also had an eighty person carpenter crew that went around repairing bridges, tunnels, and other structures. At that time, my only substantial possession was an old greyhound bus. I built a tepee and kept the twenty-two foot poles on top of the bus. The tepee was huge, eighteen feet around. I could leave the Farm in my bus, go a distance, pitch my tepee, and just paint. I also taught at the Farm almost a semester and a half, but my students said, "Get a life, Jim." They chased me away from teaching, so I left the commune.

While at the Farm, I had met a nurse, one of the midwives, and she went with me all

over the country just painting. When we found a place we liked, we'd pitch the tepee. We lived like that a couple of years. I think I was trying to renew my spirit that had been depleted by teaching. I'll never teach again because it took everything out of me.

My freedom then, now, and always has been at a heck of a price. My first wife and I were married for sixteen years. When she completed a program to become a social worker, she said, "Jim, you and I just got married too young, and I never was really attracted to you. Goodbye." And here I was with a daughter in high school! My daughter got through school, moved out, grew up, and was fine. But I paid the price of knowing that my wife had always wanted a little more security, and in the 1970s I could only make around \$10,000 a year on art work. It wasn't enough to raise a family, so I supplemented my income by using the skills I had learned during my college years when I did carpentry and laid linoleum. I would look for the newspaper ads that asked for repairs and such on Saturdays, and that would help. We were poor economically, but we had all these cultural riches. Yet my wife wasn't really willing to accept that kind of life. My hair was long, and my beard -- I can't blame my wife one bit. That was a traumatic time for me because I had always thought I would be married, but here I was moving into Downer's Grove and dating. It was so upsetting!

When I was at the Farm, I was finishing a book. The last chapter was about creativity, how women have the ultimate creativity because they can have children. I remarked, "Well, I'm about finished here," and the nurse said, "I can tell that you want another child. I'll give you one." I took a course in midwifery, she became pregnant, and I was given a son, Dustin. I delivered him, and it was a real nice experience.

Dustin was born while we were traveling in the bus. His mother was a real, real hippie.

She was a nice lady, but there has to be something wrong with her because she's always traveling. She is never, ever in one spot. Raising children and traveling at the same time--in a sense, there's a detachment there. I was raised that way. I knew it couldn't possibly work, so when Dustin was a couple of months old, we flipped a coin to see where we would settle down. She wanted to go to Pago Pago in Samoa. We were in the mountains of Colorado, and I said, "I don't care too much for the Colorado mountains because they're not very friendly, so let's go to Vermont and raise our son. We went, and one day I woke up and she was just gone. She said, "I can't stay in one place." That was okay. I had kind of expected it. Dustin and I have been together all his life. I would stand at my easel, and Dustin would be like a little football right under my arm while I painted. I finally did get remarried years later, six years ago, and I'm happily married now. Dustin is a freshman in high school. He is in the college prep program. He's very smart, but it seems like everything he does irritates me. He starts homework at 10:00 p.m., and he'll go at it until midnight. I never really harass him, but it bothers me and he knows it bothers me. I offer to help Dustin with his school work if he needs any help, and he says, "I'm not a whiner." He's a real Mr. Man.

I do what I can to help my son grow and develop in this world, and at the same time, I try to help my community, the Waukegan community. I would like to improve the climate for kids in this town. I think that our common interests in settings conducive to just being a kid are the real reason that Ray Bradbury and I got to be friends. He had imagined himself as a youth running wild in the canyons of Waukegan. And I had actually run wild in the canyons of San Diego. I met Bradbury in California. We were in Venice, and I ran into him at an annual poetry contest hosted at a bar. The contest attracts three or four thousand applicants,

and Bradbury was part of the screening process. I was setting up my paintings, trying to catch some of the insanity. Bradbury and I had an affinity, but we had some very different views on subjects like the homeless. I liked to play my liberal attitude. He is a much older person, and he believes that you don't have to tolerate homeless people peeing on the sidewalk in front of your shop. I'm growing into some of his attitudes. I agree with him that these people have to go back to their families. Their families have to rediscipline them. And if the responsibility of the extended family doesn't work, Bradbury contends, then we have mental institutions. It's just one or the other. He was really into saving small town America, and he came out with a beautiful little book a few years ago called *Yestermorrow*. I was able to be of some help to him on that. The book is about little towns where cowboys could kick up their heels and enjoy the courtship of life, everything that little towns have to offer. You could say that that's part of the reason I came to Waukegan.

After my travels, I landed back here in the Chicago area. I was in this little business making area rugs with three Jewish housewives, doctors' wives that wanted their own lives. It worked out really well. They got their own lives, and they're still running the store. They call it Floorscapes now. It's in Highland Park, and I started to feel like, "I don't really belong here. Where do I belong?" I didn't feel that comfortable because the store seemed to be about prestige, and I wanted to do something where I could make a difference in people's lives. That was my job description that I had written way back when I was in college. I needed to be true to my job description, and Waukegan was the worst town I could find with a lake view.

I make a difference in my own life by living as simply as I can. Right now I'm trying

to live on \$5,500 a year. My costs are down to about \$21,000 or \$22,000 for my expenses, and I try to live on \$100 per week. It's a little bit hard with Dustin in high school, with books and things, but there are ways of doing it without Public Aid, and the rest of my income I give away. I'm serious about the job description that I wrote when I was just starting out. I wrote that I wanted to effect social change and that would be my job, so if I have anything extra, and I'm a commercial artist, I'm not really being true to what my job is. When I was at Berkeley, I was particularly affected by something the professors used to say: "Artists are very poor but that's good because then they are living on the edge of a picket fence and they are always telling the truth. You have to tell the truth and money has to be completely out of the picture or very, very secondary." But you get tired. Every once in a while, I'll sell a painting for \$10,000 or so and take a little vacation.

I am married to a lady who wants a lot of things, but she makes \$50,000 a year and can take whatever money she wants to do whatever she wants. But I'm more into trading. My daughter is getting a divorce, so I ran a painting over to her attorney and said, "Here. Now the divorce is paid for." He said, "Are you sure? Do I owe you some money?" He knows that the appraised value of my paintings is high. He loved it. Everybody's happy. We have, as they say in the business world, a win/win situation. My daughter's husband got a girlfriend. I have three grandchildren. I'm trying to help them and my daughter. I want to make a difference in their lives. My action lines and their benefits are clear, uncomplicated, and devoid of politics. Unfortunately, most things are not that simple.

I hate politics, and as an example of politics gone berserk, consider the board for welfare reform that Governor Edgar put me on. I shouldn't call it that. It's properly called the

Waukegan Community Federation. We had a board meeting, and all the providers came out the woodwork to try to load up the board. It's a twenty-four person board with a third of the members from the private sector, a third from public agencies like the schools, police, etc., and a third from provider groups. Well, the providers are so worried about losing their income with all the reform coming that they stacked the board. And there are so many unsavory things that are happening that I should take a tape recorder to the meetings. That's about the only time I feel like carrying one. The whole business of that board kind of eats away at me. We pulled twenty-five women off welfare a while back, and I thought it was going to be real challenging to get their kids good day care and get the women training and a good job in exchange for their welfare checks. I thought I was going to get a lot of heat from their men and their families because they might not want that kind of change, but it seems to be working. The women want their independence. I don't think some of their boyfriends do. We started with twenty-five women, but this is going to go across the board in a couple of years. I'm pushing these reforms because I think they will help to put responsibility, dignity, and hope back into these women's lives, but it's real scary.

I'm the only social deviate on the board. I'm a deviate because I'm truly from the public sector. I've wanted to quit a dozen times but several people say, "You can't quit. You're the only person holding that thing together."

Even though I hate being politically involved, it sometimes seems the only way to make a difference. I hate it. I really hate it, but I have to do it. I unseated some people when they went after the old Andrew Carnegie Library. It is a wonderful, structurally sound building, and they were going to tear it down, so I instituted the whole goddamn thing of

saving it. When the city officials made their move to tear it down, I organized the wards in town and I hired two people for three months to help me with all the surveying and getting all the newspaper articles out. I had Ray Bradbury come to town, and he stayed with us a while to make sure it didn't happen. I got the building away from the city. I only paid a dollar for it, that's the beautiful part, and now it's under the auspices of a not-for-profit organization that's dedicated to remodeling it for a children's museum.

There are and have been all kinds of wars going on like that. The former mayor, Haig Paravonian, was lip synching to the citizenry, "I am your friend," but he really had developers out there who wanted to put a condo on the bluff line. Now, that land is dedicated. It was given for either a park or a library. And it's a bluff line on the lake, for goodness' sake! I unseated an alderman in my neighborhood who wouldn't vote against the condo, and I unseated the mayor. Well, the mayor's family remained friends. In fact, he came by the house a while back and took me and my wife down to a comedy club where his boy was playing. Two weeks later he died from a heart problem. He was kind of into the arts, kind of, but he was more into politics than anything else.

Oh, there have been many wars. For instance, I brought a group of people together who were going to remodel the old Chateau Hotel, a thirteen story building, for 5.1 million dollars. The architect and everybody were ready to go, but they were not going to include a parking garage for that money. The parking garage is there now. Another deal was cut. A new group of guys came in and said, "Well, we can include the parking garage for 7 million dollars." And what they did is a shame. They just gave a little surface touch, and they probably spent 3.5 million. Somebody stuck the rest of that money in their pocket, obviously.

But I'm not that type of political person who understands who gets what.

Similar politics occurred when I bought the Globe Department Store in the middle of town. I was going to open a theatre and a children's museum in there, but during that same period of time -- this was about six or more years ago -- the politicians threw such an uproar because I moved thirty-five artists into the space, and we were having this ongoing display. It was beautiful. The city said they had to buy the building back. My dad had always told me not to fight city hall, so I gave it back to them. They never did pay me for my engineering work. I had had about \$12,000 worth of architect's work done, and they promised to pay me for that but they never did carry through. Then I found out they wanted to put city hall there. They had refused to tell me what they wanted to do with it beyond the fact that it was for a very, very important governmental agency. When they made their presentation to put city hall there, the city council wouldn't even approve it. The mayor only had three votes from the council, so the property sat there for two years. Then the Globe turned into a college, the College of Lake County, which is good in a way, but in a way it isn't. You see, it isn't really a college. It's more like a night school where people get dropped off and picked up. They don't live down here. There are no taxes being paid from all the revenue that is being generated. There are no taxes going to improve society here. But I can't argue against the improvements on the other end. CLC is really helping a lot of first generation college students who need a boost in getting an education and access to better jobs.

But the college isn't directly affecting the education of children in the community, so that's where the art bus comes in. The idea for the bus is over twelve years old. In 1983-84, the University of Virginia asked me to do a show on this family. I lived for nine months in

Hurricane Hollow in Wise, Virginia, way up in the mountains, in coal mining country. Wise is the county seat. Unlike Waukegan, the closer you get to the county seat in most places, the better off you are. I did a study and a show of about eighteen paintings on the Gilliam family who were coal miners and bootleggers. In fact, Hup Gilliam, the head male of the family who just recently died, had been a coal miner for about twelve years when he started his family with Melvina Gilliam. Melvina was more into bootlegging than coal mining, so she got Hup set up out there in the woods with a liquor still. The society was matriarchal, and Melvina wouldn't let Hup back into the house after the children were born. He lived out in the woods for eighteen years with that still, and Melvina sold bottles of whiskey to the sheriff and everybody else. Their hollow was called Home Brew Hollow, and that's how Melvina got all her kids through college. They all became college graduates -- an accountant, a lawyer, a doctor, a writer who wrote for a national sports magazine when I knew him.

Hup began doing drugs at about seventy or seventy-five years of age when a psychiatrist that he went to in Wise got him started. The psychiatrist was a heavy drug peddler. They put Hup in an old age home, and I got him out. I was willing to take care of him, and I signed the papers and I did take care of him along with his son John who wasn't really that capable of doing the job. John was emotionally upset all the time. He was gay, and living out in the middle of the woods when you're gay with a lot of coal miners around you is not good. John needed to go back to New York or somewhere, but he had gotten beat up and had suffered an emotional crisis. He liked me a lot, though, and followed me around. When he started buying me jewelry, I really got worried for a while. I couldn't shake him. He proved to be really helpful at getting me from family to family. Without him, I might have

gotten shot going on some of those places just trying to say hello.

I did the study of the family and the series of eighteen paintings, and they all went into a mobile that would go from high school to high school as part of a program encouraging kids not to quit school. It was a good program. I used the people and culture of Wise, distilled into the Gilliam family, as the basis for the paintings. Because the people had no transportation, they walked everywhere, and that subject comprises one of my paintings. There was a lot of black lung in that area, and the corner store in Wise, instead of being a 7-11 or a dry cleaners, would be a place to get oxygen. There was a proliferation of little oxygen stores. So I brought all of these things into the paintings, things such as script, walking, oxygen, bootlegging, coal mining, family life, and many other aspects of that whole society.

It occurred to me that maybe I should start a bus service between three little towns, Wise, Coeburn, and Norton, that are in relatively close proximity to each other. I thought the hospitals should finance the bus because most of those people walking were going to the hospital. Most of the clinics and services were, in one way or another, attached to the hospital if not actually housed in the hospital buildings. I was able to pull that together and get a little bus going. The traveling art mobile had given me the inspiration. It had a multitude of educational and cultural benefits that were made possible by changes that Kennedy had instituted. He had built a highway which had enhanced access to various towns. He had filled in many of the abandoned mines so they wouldn't fill up with water and pollute the underground water sources. These strides were efforts to make good on his campaign promises. I incorporated that history into my study and added the art bus concept to my repertoire of ideas for future replication.

When Dustin and I came to the Chicago area, I was thinking about starting an art mobile in Highland Park. It didn't seem appropriate somehow, but it would be, and I was thinking that maybe I should just do it. Several communities, such as Quincy, Illinois, have asked me to show them how to put the players together to start their own art buses. Basically, they are interested in knowing how to finance the venture. An art bus only costs \$15,000 a year. It's ridiculous how inexpensive it is, but you do need an administrator, perhaps from the township, to help keep the volunteers organized. And you need an agency like the Park District that does maintenance on its own trucks to volunteer to do the bus maintenance. I would say that if I just stopped painting and did a brochure, I would become instantly rich because there are a thousand communities that could really use these services. Education systems are quick to drop art programs in the schools, and I thought that if I could reach one generation. . . . Waukegan looks as unattractive as it does because we need to bring some art back to it. And the kids who get on that bus, they climb right on. It's good for ages four to twelve. The teenagers need their own place.

I'm thinking about setting up a little store down here where teenagers can sell their art work, to complete the cycle. They will get on the bus now to help the younger ones to follow directions. The Hispanic families are especially good about that. An older girl will get on and help three or four younger ones. If the kids are given an assignment, they listen, they follow it, they go to work. The only rowdy people generally in the Waukegan area are the parents. They're squabbling outside, and the children are saying, "Shhhhhhhhh!" because art is a kind of quiet thing.

The only really hard case that I have encountered in the bus is Rolling Green. It's a

project in North Chicago. The kids are carrying knives and they're really rough and tough, and the parents come outside the bus and say stuff like, "You white honky, what you doing here? What you doing in my neighborhood? How come you threw my kid off the bus?" Well, it's because their kid was trying to stab another kid. I did a lot of finger paint. It's as simple as you can get. Use one little teeny cup of paint on a single still life subject. I said, "Here's your assignment." Those Rolling Green kids took these big jars of finger paint and dumped them upside down and started throwing them around the bus and I'm by myself. The area really needs help, but these people were out of control. Rolling Green is identical to Cabrini Green where a whole society of people is out of control in a sense, but they're really not because they function very well within their society. There is a lot of rough stuff going on that in our perspective may seem dysfunctional, but they're living and going through life. So, who am I to . . . ? Well, I have a hard time with Rolling Green. My wife really doesn't want me there. She knows I'm going to get killed because I'm throwing kids off the bus.

I turned the whole bus thing over to the township, and I'm working with Becky DeAngelis. Now Becky goes to Rolling Green. She has a photography program, and she has the youth program for the township. Becky lost a volunteer, the fellow who's the graphic artist over at the News-Sun, because he is taking a night class until mid November in typing. He couldn't -- didn't want to -- do Rolling Green. But that's the area that really needs the work. I'm not the person to do it because I'm white, number one, and number two is that I'm not a real teacher; I'm an artist. And I'm too soft spoken. A man came up and analyzed what I was doing. He lives in the Rolling Green area. He said, "Jim, you're way too soft spoken. You have to be much more aggressive. You have to be tough. If a kid starts reaching his arm

into your supply cabinet, you shut the door on his arm. You don't ask him not to do it." All this interaction would disturb me, and I would go home and be upset for hours and hours. I'm not willing to do that, I don't think. I don't want to change my life that much. I'm not that dedicated to that particular niche of our society that I feel a real calling to serve Rolling Green. The calling comes for the Hispanic kids and the black kids and the white kids here in Waukegan who have a certain amount of discipline in their lives and they can hear you talk. But I have this lady who serves the white kids on the north side of Waukegan. They're more into crafts. The Hispanic and the black kids are more into the fine arts; they seem more creative. I hate to generalize like that, but it's true.

I'm going to open a store for teenagers because they need a sense of how to run a business. You are never taught in college or high school or anywhere else how to live a life as an artist. Artists have no idea how to do it, and they are always unhappy. They all ultimately fail. There are only about maybe a thousand in the country who are making a living at art. If the kids had a store, they could show themselves the gestalt of the art experience. I'm hooking up with Hull House to make this happen. Hull House has a 3,000 foot space that they use. There is one area about the size of my shop that they can part with at one o'clock in the afternoons. That would work out perfectly for the kids. They could operate the store from around 1:30 to 7:00 p.m. and go through what a store owner goes through. We could mix things up by bringing in some rough kids as well as some kids from the Honors Program and get them working together on the same objectives. The objectives would include marketing, accounting, and other very simple disciplines that would teach how to survive as an artist. The kids could grapple with real questions: What would I paint to survive? How

would I express myself? There is always that fine line between creativity and what people will accept. Are you going to survive if nobody is your patron? They don't really have patrons in this country. They have the Endowment for the Arts, but that's like, "Here's \$500 for your show." How far will \$500 go?

I had to figure out how to live as an artist. It's like if your shoes don't fit, you find a pair that do. You have a job description, and you figure out how to fit yourself and your limitations into that description. My limitations include the fact that I didn't come from a family of creative people, so my artwork will never get too much better than it is now. I know where the level of art genius is, and I know what very bad art is because I am in the trade. And I don't feel critical of either side. I know where I am, and I say, "Well, o'okay, this is me. What do I do?" I'm painting maybe in the top 300 in the world right now, and I realize that I'm never going to be in the top twenty. That's o'okay. What do I do? Why, I stay to my job description. But things still get complicated.

A case in point is that painting of a little Waukegan house that I made a little prettier and offered to ReMax as a way of helping the homeless. I called it *American Dream Home*. All the realtors of ReMax had to use it for a closing gift. In my opinion, realtors help to create homelessness because for every house that they sell, they jack up the price by at least 6 percent in commission, plus whatever greed is involved. So they create homelessness by putting houses out of reach of so many people. I remember just a few years ago I could buy a very nice house for \$17,900, and now that house would cost \$179,000. So I feel that realtors play a part in the derailment of the American dream, hence the title of the painting. And that one little print raised \$300,000 in two years for the homeless. It all went to the

homeless.

We serve the homeless and others through the Cares Foundation. Whenever one of these agencies around here needs \$5,000, the Cares Foundation gives them the money. We give money to whomever we can, like a women's shelter called A Safe Place, a food pantry, and various other agencies. During the couple of years that I was selling prints of *American Dream Home*, I went to a mortgage company that wanted ReMax's business, played them against each other, and sold to both of them. Northwest Mortgage Company sold thousands and thousands and thousands of those prints. I had homeless people frame the prints. That fit my job description. The job was nice and simple. We used a frame that was basically done already. All the framers had to do was drop the picture in, put it in a package, and gift wrap the package. If you just go outside the door here, the homeless are walking up and down the street. They are easy to find for a project like this. And as workers, they are not just recipients of goods, not just "the problem"; they are also part of what is supposed to be a solution.

The problem with helping the homeless and others in need is that all the court houses and all the social workers are trying to protect their own interests. They will create any kind of program to maintain homelessness and other miseries to keep their jobs. They're just lying in wait like tigers and lions right outside the courthouse doors. All their agencies are lined up and down the street in the middle of a town. There should be a little downtown where you can enjoy the courtship of life, but the social agencies are feeding off these problems that the judges let out of the room, and then the problems get paraded up and down the street. And no matter what you do to alleviate misery, there are a lot of things maybe you shouldn't do. For instance, at ReMax I stopped the *American Dream Home* venture because they used it

for every rag, it seemed, in the country. They publicized, “ReMax is supporting the homeless, da, da, do, via this print.” And they’d show pictures of it and pictures of me with their owners. They got at least \$15,000,000 worth of free publicity out of that print, and I got only \$300,000 for the homeless. So maybe I created more homelessness by helping to line the pockets of realtors, by helping to push the price of a house just a little further out of someone’s reach. You see what I’m saying?

So I just decided that I don’t want to do this win/win corporate thing. These people don’t make me feel good. I don’t like going to their conventions. I went to Ace Hardware and I gave them a painting and they auctioned it off for over \$10,000. I sold them 5,000 of the prints. The proceeds go to the Children’s Miracle Network. That’s how I work. Most of my artwork goes for prints for charity. A corporation provides monies through hospitals. That’s fine with me, and it’s a very clean operation for them. They can just give money, wash their hands, and feel good. But it is so political! They wanted so much of me! I said, “Give me \$3,000. No, you’d better give me \$5,000.” So they gave me \$5,000 because I knew they were going to auction the painting off and get \$10,000 from it. I had to supply the prints for them. That cost me \$4,000. Every time I print a piece, it’s \$3,800 or more. An oversize print cost me \$7,000, for example. And it just didn’t work out very well. I spent a lot of time. The convention was in Texas, and by the time it was done, I had lost \$50,000. I didn’t want to lose money. I just wanted to break even and then make a few hundred bucks.

I have a painting here of members of the old Negro Baseball League. The League dissolved in the 1950s. One of the guys died just recently, a few weeks ago. Prior to his dying, all of them came to my shop and signed these prints, all 750 of them. I have been

working on this project with two Chicago Bears players, Wendell Davis and Thomas Sanders, here in Waukegan. They have a little business, All Stars Sports, in Palatine. They market the prints of the Old Negro League on the Internet, and the proceeds go to retarded children. They paid me \$10,000 for the painting, and it cost me about \$5,000 because I had to bring the Negro League players to town and keep them over at the Holiday Inn. So that was expensive, but the project is a good one. It is kind of a pure concept of win/win. You just do something, and it helps somebody. These Negro League players never got any social security. They are all kind of down and out. Now they're getting 60 percent of the money from the prints. You figure about 35 percent is hard dollar costs for the football players that I'm working with. If you count the framing and the web site and everything, you can conclude that they are breaking even on the project. And the Negro League players are getting the proceeds. Sixty percent is a good amount. With the United Way, the money to recipients is only about twenty cents on the dollar. The Negro League project is doing a lot better than that and is a good thing all around.

Another good thing is the youth center that we put together on Belvidere. It is a really nice place and a wonderful service to the community. I put the bus together at the youth center with help from volunteers. We tore the seats out, built cabinets in the bus, installed a sink, and generally completed our transformation. The youth center includes gang outreach in its list of activities, and during the summer, I had one afternoon a week with just the gangs. They were great. They were like angels compared to that Rolling Green bunch. They loved our work, especially the graffiti part. I have these large boxes of chalk, and we'd go out and decorate the sidewalks with chalk. The basis of our relationship was, "What's better than

graffiti?" The answer was, "Here it is." I'd like to provide the kids from gang outreach with a store. If I could only stay away from politics and keep my head low. . . but that's just about impossible to do.

There is so much to do that I would love to do. I found this little town, Wayland, Missouri, that's all boarded up. Nobody lives there. It's near the Mississippi River but off the flood plain. Five hundred people live around the town. And still it's all boarded up. It's a poor town. It's one of the lowest income towns in the entire United States, and the people there have this attitude that they can't do anything. So I bought the whole goddamn town and credited it to a not-for-profit group. I gave them \$50,000 worth of tiger prints with which to raise some start-up funds. So now they have this big committee between here and Hannibal and St. Louis where they are selling the prints. Columbia University Missouri has a tiger mascot, and the prints are selling like crazy at their football games. Seventeen Amish families live around Wayland. They're standoffish, but they will ride in a car if transportation is arranged for them, and they will take a job when their farm duties do not interfere. The committee is paying these Amish people to restore the town. They are in the process of restoring it now, and they are going to need some ongoing financial support. So that's what this next show that I'm doing in St. Louis is about. This whole deal is rife with politics, in a way, but so far it's the colorful but fun kind, and the local history is interesting. You see, Mary, who is heading up the construction crew, is working with Everett, the husband of the mayor, Sue Hill, who wants to tear the town down. And Lucretia Crow heads the not-for-profit group. Her great grandfather befriended the Indians of the area and started the community of Wayland during Marquette's time. For many who are involved, the restoration

of Wayland will be a labor of love.

Picasso kept saying -- and during his last twenty years he probably made so many mistakes he had to say it -- that the only thing that's important in the whole world is love, that love is the bottom line in the universe. I try to keep sight of that. I know that for everything you do, there's always a shitty part of it. There's always an equal amount of light and dark. Maybe a little bit more dark. Maybe a little bit more negative than positive. But I'm kind of like a biological organism. I have to be positive. I'm moving, so I have to try to keep a positive balance. If I clap my hands, I want the sound that goes out to be a positive rather than a negative sound because I believe that it travels forever through the universe. That's where the love is, then. It's in our actions and in our intentions. And I think that Picasso was right. I think that loving is the most important thing that we can do. Loving fits my job description, it just feels right for me, and I intend to stay with it all of my life.

CHAPTER VI

MAY I HELP YOU?

Ray Rodriguez, 52, is principal of Oak Terrace Elementary School in the Highland Park, Illinois, Public School District. Because Ray is also my husband, I really wrestled with whether I should include him in my study. True, he was one of the important reasons that I was intrigued by the subject of first-generation college graduates. For years I had questioned why his aspirations and accomplishments had been so different from those of his siblings. I had observed some of his family's ambivalent reactions to his achievements as well as his siblings' encouragement of their children to get as much education as they could. Including him in the study, it began to seem clear, would help to answer some of my perennial queries. But would I be objective enough? What would our "working" relationship be? How neutral a territory would I need to establish for our interview?

I approached our interview with as few as possible of my previous preconceptions about relevant areas of Ray's life. I assumed that there were worlds of details that I did not know about my husband's early life and college experiences -- and about his activism -- and I was right. I learned much about him from my study, but there are vast areas of pertinent information that I knew about already which we did not touch upon during our interview. For instance, I recall a bitterly cold day many years ago when we were walking to our car

in Waukegan. Coming toward us was an obviously very poor Mexican family. The man had no coat, and Ray took his off and handed it to him. I remember the family's gratitude and their incredulity as clearly as if the incident had just now occurred.

When I was a kid, I lived with my family on 100th Street in East Harlem in New York City. There were twenty-seven tenements on our street, and they were occupied, according to the *New York Herald Tribune*, by 5,000 men, women, and children. Each tenement had six four-room apartments on each of five levels. And the population, even though this was Spanish Harlem, also included blacks, Jews, Italians, Asians, and many other's groups. Ours was a cosmopolitan neighborhood with a real sense of community. Every year we held a block party where the summer's luckiest beauty would be crowned Miss 100th Street. There were lots of kids on our block, and in the summer we would climb the fire escapes and play on the roofs, or we would run in and out of the deluge from open fire hydrants in a futile attempt to stay cool. The street teemed with life and death. People sat on the stoops or leaned out their windows to catch the fresh air. Prostitutes met their johns on the block, and tough guy gang members claimed the street as their turf. Junkies nodded, and I once saw a man, his stomach split open by a straight razor, holding his guts in place with bloodied hands. After a long day in the factories, tired workers waited for the rum man to begin serving shots. The perennially hopeful waited to check their latest prophecies with the numbers runner. Young lovers waited for the evening shadows to deepen. But for the great majority of the 5,000 who were children, the only action we were looking for was the arrival of the coquito cart.

I was born at home on July 5, 1944, and grew up in an apartment crowded with people. For most of my childhood, my two younger sisters and I were the only children actually living in our home. But every morning, two of our older siblings would bring their children to our house for the day. On school days, they would come before and after school. My younger sisters and I were only a few years older than our nieces and nephews, and we generally felt completely displaced by them. It was as if we were visitors in some noisy, inhospitable place from which we could never return home. Relatives from Puerto Rico and other places would visit us for what seemed like interminable stretches. And on Sundays, my mother's four older children would show up with their entire families in tow.

With all our relatives on hand for meals, we ate in shifts. Because there were so many people to feed, we ate hurriedly and quietly. "Be quiet and eat!" we were told if we talked during the meal. "And clean your plate!" I had no trouble with the latter. But the numbers of people! Sick relatives stayed at our house. Dead relatives were often laid out there. My aunt Emilia passed away when I was a kid, and I remember that she lay in state in our living room for three days. To this day, the smell of carnations, gladiolas, and gardenias reminds me of death.

The 1950s saw the largest migration of all time from Puerto Rico to New York City. Many New Yorkers expected these newcomers to know English already or to learn it very quickly. I started kindergarten around this time and sometimes heard teachers make negative comments about me or other Puerto Rican people because we did not speak English well. I recall hearing people at school say that we were now in America and should forget our Spanish and learn English. These interchanges did not make me feel good because I believed

that it was o'kay to be Puerto Rican and to speak Spanish. There were no special programs for those of us who did not speak English, and we sank or swam on our own. I did not catch on easily at school, and with the exception of kindergarten, my early years in the classroom were difficult. Groups of us were sent to speech therapy three times a week because we were not fluent in English. But the speech therapist was very nice and recognized full well that we did not have speech problems beyond an inadequate knowledge of the English language.

I went to kindergarten at P.S. 121, a few blocks from my house. My teacher was Mrs. Williams, an African American woman who was bubbly and loved all of us children. I thought she was just wonderful. I had been scared to go to school at first, but after being with Mrs. Williams for a couple of days, I was comfortable in my new environment. I learned later that Mrs. Williams had grown up in East Harlem. She knew the community and its people. I could tell that she loved me even though she did not speak Spanish. By the end of my kindergarten year, I was speaking English a lot better, and I looked forward to starting first grade at P.S. 109.

Unfortunately, I did not feel welcomed by my first, second, or third grade teachers. It was clear that they did not like me. By second grade, it was also clear that I had some trouble reading quickly. In second and third grades, I was always in the slowest reading group, and my math skills were also quite poor. I did not enjoy school during those years. I felt unsure of myself, as if I did not fit in. But then I got into fourth grade and met Mrs. McGillicutty, and school became a wonderful place again.

Mrs. McGillicutty must have been from Boston. She had an accent, and right away I felt better about my own. When she talked to you, she would put her arm around you. Or

she would put her hands on both your shoulders and smile at you. She was dramatic and would assume the voices of different characters as she read aloud. I remember that we were studying the Boston tea party and Mrs. McGillicutty told us excitedly to play roles. "You're Revolutionaries," she said to a few of us. She huddled with us for several moments like we were co-conspirators before she was off, whispering to the next group who would play the British or the Indians or the French. My love of history began when I was in fourth grade all because of Mrs. McGillicutty.

Like a bad dream, Mrs. Pevco, who had taught me in third grade, recurred as my fifth grade teacher. Distance from me had not made her heart grow fonder, and one day her great dislike of me and impatience with what she saw as my dullness overpowered her good judgment. She had given an assignment and I had failed to complete it to her specifications. She was so exasperated! "You stupid little spic!" she hissed. And without thinking about the consequences at all, I slapped her face. Hard. I had to go home and tell my mother what I had done, and she had to accompany me to school to meet with the principal and the teacher. I felt horrible. My mother was shy around people whom she did not know, and she was not confident speaking English with them. She knew that we were in big trouble, and she called one of my older sisters to go to school with us in case we needed a translator. I knew that I had done wrong, and my mother must have been as worried as I was about the severity of punishment that I would receive. By some lucky chance, the principal asked me for my side of the story first. He seemed shocked at my account, which Mrs. Pevco admitted was true. I was proud that my mother stood up for me in front of the principal and Mrs. Pevco. She told the principal that I was wrong but that the teacher should have known better than to call

a little kid names. A few days later, Mrs. Pevco was transferred and we got Mrs. Kravitz as our new fifth grade teacher. We all loved Mrs. Kravitz. I realize now that Mrs. Pevco could have been in trouble with the principal for calling other Spanish speaking kids spics way before my case ever came to his attention. It could be that my incident was just the straw that broke the camel's back. But I went around for quite some time feeling that every kid in fifth grade owed me exclusively for their good fortune.

If I was not setting the world on fire academically by sixth grade, and I wasn't, I was at least consistent in liking the school experience. My teacher, Mrs. Law, was creatively structured. We would enter the classroom every morning to the calming effect of beautiful classical music that she would play on the piano. Then we would quietly contemplate the assignments for the morning and for the afternoon that Mrs. Law would have put on the board. She had high expectations of us, and she gave no slack. But she explained assignments very well and taught us strategies and techniques that we could use to enhance learning. I believe that my experience in elementary school with excellent, caring teachers like Mrs. Law helped to dissipate the inferiority complex that I had learned in the primary grades. Luckily, I connected with teachers in junior high school who continued to make the world of academia a warm and familiar place.

Some of my best experiences in junior high school were with my counselor and English teacher, Mr. Pellman, a wonderful person from a poor Jewish family who had grown up in New York City. He was not merely concerned about us, he was empathetic. I remember that he helped me to choose a high school, that my choice turned out to be the school where his wife taught, and that he kept up with me via his wife throughout my high school years.

Mr. Pellman also made sure that my high school had an academic bent, rather than a vocational one, since he knew that I was interested in going to college. Another excellent influence in junior high was provided by my music teacher, Mr. Bridges, a humorous gentleman from Barbados who told me that I had a good voice but didn't know what to do with it. He talked me into playing string bass in the orchestra and singing in the chorus for all three of the years that I was in junior high. I felt that I learned self discipline and made academic progress in junior high, even though I still had difficulty with reading and math. My mother could only help me with Spanish, and my dad couldn't help me with school work at all. Yet, he had an incredible reverence for education.

My father was a merchant seaman, so he was away on ship for three weeks out of the month and at home the fourth week. Every morning when I was growing up, if my dad was home, he would go down to the store and buy fresh bread, milk, and a newspaper. He always bought *The Daily News*, which had pictures, rather than *The New York Times*, which generally did not. Then he would come upstairs and look through the newspaper. On Sundays, he would make an omelette and Spanish coffee for our brunch before he returned to ship. I did not know that my dad could not read until I was older, and I thought it was wonderful that he had modeled reading by buying the paper and looking at it. As I got older, he would sometimes ask me questions about the pictures and what they meant. My father's newspaper is something that just sticks in my mind. He retired the year I went off to college, and he continued every morning to buy bread, milk, and the paper. He was very curious about what was happening in the world, and I was glad when he gained access to cable television and the Spanish television programs.

Both of my parents grew up in Puerto Rico where my mother received an eighth grade education, while my father only went to third grade. My maternal grandfather had wanted all his children to graduate from eighth grade and resolved to send them on to the Catholic high school if they were inclined to go. Because my mother's two older sisters had gotten married after graduation from high school, my grandfather saw their education as a waste of their time and his money. He refused to let my mother attend high school since he believed she would probably get married after graduation just like her two sisters before her.

My father had a much more difficult life. His own father had been a terrible person who abandoned my grandmother and their young son in San Juan. My grandmother was destitute, so she went home to her brothers on the family farm. She was received as a servant, and my father was not allowed to go to school after he reached third grade. He never talked much about his early childhood, but he did tell me that his uncles worked him almost like an animal. When he was twelve years old, he ran away to his birth place, San Juan, lied about his age, and got a job as a stevedor on the docks. Years later, his mother came to the city, and he supported her and two of his cousins. Much later, when his mother and her second husband were very old and alone in Puerto Rico, my father faithfully sent them money to supplement their upkeep.

My father wanted us to go through high school so that we could do better than he had, but no one in my family ever talked about college. I know that I got the idea that I wanted to earn a college degree from several interventions in my life. One was that I had been a Fresh Air kid and had been sent to camp outside New York City. Sponsored by *The New York Herald Tribune*, the Fresh Air Program matched people from the New York City

suburbs and contiguous states with children from the inner city. "Camp" was a two week period when children such as I could be a part of someone else's family in an entirely different environment. I first went to Fresh Air camp when I was seven years old. When I was eight, I went to Ma and Pa Hovey's in Pennsylvania. That experience opened my eyes to a whole new world. Pa Hovey commuted by train to his job in Philadelphia where he was a writer for a newspaper. He was up in age, so he worked just two days a week. He and Ma Hovey had married later in life, and when I met them Ma Hovey was already middle aged. She had been an English teacher. They had a son who was one year younger than I was.

There were lots of books at Ma and Pa Hovey's house, and every night, Ma Hovey would read wonderful stories to Robert and me. And when we sat down for dinner, they always talked about things and asked our opinion. Now, as an eight year old, I didn't have lots of opinions, but they would engage both me and Robert. I was shy, but they were expert at finding subjects that I could talk about: How our day had gone, what we had been reading, what we wanted to do the next day. Did we want to go hiking? Swimming? The table was set with dishes that matched, and everyone had a fork, spoon, knife, and napkin. This was new for me since at home we never used both a spoon and a fork. Even as adults, two of my sisters were afraid that they would stab themselves in the jaw or tongue if they were to eat with a fork. They are still more comfortable eating with a spoon.

The Hoveys lived at the end of the street on an acre of land. Behind their property was a huge farm, so the land seemed to go on forever. There were apple and other fruit trees, plus trees that were especially good for climbing. We would pick fruit and Ma Hovey would make pies. She always said the fruit would be better in the fall, but we would eat it anyway. I had

such a nice time with the Hoveys that I went back the next year. The Fresh Air Fund generally did not send kids back to the same family two years in a row, but the Hoveys asked for me. Again, I had a wonderful time. After my second summer in Pennsylvania, the Fresh Air Fund would no longer pay for me to go to the Hoveys, so they began paying for my tickets to and from their home themselves, and I began staying with them for a month. I returned to the Hoveys at their expense every year until I was fourteen, when I began working in the summers to save for college. Each visit was a different experience for me. The Hoveys were not rich, but they were well off. They were educated, and they could do whatever they wanted to do. For example, every year we would go to New Jersey to the seashore. Sometimes we would stay at a little inn for three days. We would collect sea shells, and I recall our talking about them and the different places they probably had been. Sometimes we would not stay at the seashore for three days, but we always had a wonderful time. Pa Hovey would drive us to New Jersey, and I remember thinking that some day I wanted to be able to do those things for myself and whatever family I happened to have.

Another important intervention in my life occurred when a new group of ministers came to my neighborhood to start a Protestant ministry. Among this group were George and Buffy Calvert, a young couple with four kids. I found that being at their house was similar to being at the Hoveys. They had loads of books and art work and were always sharing ideas and engaging everyone around them in discussions. As a means to re-establishing a dissolved church, they had begun Bible study for the young and the old. I started going to Bible study with a couple of my friends. I noticed that George and Buffy would help their children with their homework, so one day I mentioned to Buffy that I was having trouble with math. Buffy

said that she wasn't that great at math but we could work together to figure it out. She invited me to come over regularly and at a certain time. The Calvert children would be doing their homework, and either George or Buffy would help me with my studies, too. George had two degrees already and was working on another one in education so that he could teach in the public schools. His bachelor's degree was from Dartmouth, and he had earned a master's in divinity from Union Theological Seminary. Buffy had been an English teacher and had gotten her bachelor's degree from Mount Holyoke. They were raising their kids to go to college, and they started asking me questions about whether I wanted to go to college. They knew my academic weaknesses, and yet they seemed to see no reason why I should not go to college. They acted as if wanting to go to college were as natural for me as it was for their own children. They had a quality of life that I liked and intended to have. It seemed clear to me that going to college was the best way to achieve my goal.

Just how I would get to go to college was suggested to me one summer when I was at the Hovey's. They had a niece, Zoe, who came to visit them. Her parents were divorced, and she was a college student who was working and paying most of her own way through school. Ma and Pa Hovey told me about how they had worked their way through school, too. They had come from families who were educated but not wealthy. Ma Hovey's father had died when she was very young, so it had been necessary for her to do as much for herself as she could. Pa Hovey had begun college, but his studies had been interrupted by the war. After his return from the war, he had worked while he finished his degree. Here was living proof that you did not have to be rich to go to college. You had to want to go to college, and you had to work to stay there. I realized that you did not have to be Caucasian or from a

particular ethnic group to go to college because I had wonderful teachers -- black, white, Jewish -- all of whom must have gone to college.

Another intervention in my life was a music program offered to students through the New York City public schools. When I was in junior high and high school, free tickets were made available to some performances at the Metropolitan Opera House and at Symphony Hall. We would hear about the free tickets along with the general announcements made over the public address system in the mornings. All one had to do to get the tickets was to go to the dean's office and sign up for them. I was interested in the program at first because I thought that I should be interested. I thought that if you were going to college, you needed to be cultured, and if you were cultured, you needed to enjoy the opera. I had already learned from Mrs. Law that I enjoyed classical music. So I set out to put some culture into my life.

On days when I had a ticket to a performance, I would take the bus or walk across Central Park to the Met or to Symphony Hall after school. I was repeatedly fascinated by the staging, the costumes, the music, and the opulent settings. At the Met there were a main floor, a mezzanine, and two balconies. There were huge chandeliers, Corinthian columns, gold walls, and plush seats. I marveled at the audiences of white people who could take off during the day to go to the opera or symphony. For the most part, I saw no minorities in the audience or on the stage. But I did get to see Marian Anderson once, I think at Symphony Hall. My mother's response to my adventures in becoming cultured was, "That's a junk! Why do you go to that stuff?" Yet, if I were watching a classical music program on television, she was quite prone to watch it with me. And we had records by Mario Lanza that she enjoyed

playing. Actually, we had loads of wonderful records, but most of them were by popular Spanish artists.

My family did not believe that I was serious about wanting to go to college, so they were surprised when I got a job for the summer during the year I turned fourteen and asked my mother to help me open a bank account so I could start saving for college. I worked at Parish Acres, a family camp in Peekskill, New York, run by the Protestant ministry in my neighborhood. During my first summer there, I was one of the general workers who mowed the lawn, painted walls, and did anything else that needed doing. After that first summer, I was promoted to cook's assistant. Every two weeks when I would get paid, I would send my money home and my mother would put it in my bank account.

By the time of my graduation from high school, my family was adamant that I should not go off to college. I had not done well on the mathematics section of the New York State Regents Exam, so I was not awarded a Regents diploma. This nixed my application to the New York state colleges and was just another sign to my family that I was not smart enough to go to college. Fueling their case were the facts that I had been told by a high school counselor that I was not college material, and I had received a D in German. My family admonished me to get a good job and help out at home. There was no way that I could have lived at home while attending city college because the mounting pressures to work full time, the derision I had to endure for being serious about getting a college degree, and the noise and crowds almost always present in my home would have guaranteed my failure. And I could not afford to fail.

Again, help came to me from the East Harlem Protestant Parish. One of the ministers had attended divinity school at Shaw University, a historically black college in Raleigh, North Carolina. He helped me to apply to Shaw because I could afford it and they would accept me on short notice. I could also have gone to a college in the midwest, except the ticket to get there was too expensive. So Shaw it was, and with two suitcases and a foot locker, I embarked in late August on the long bus ride from New York City to the South.

I arrived at the bus station in Raleigh at 4:00 in the morning. I found a cab driver to take me to the campus, but I did not know exactly where on the campus I should go. The cabbie let me out at a building which turned out to be a women's dorm. Everything was closed, so I sat on my foot locker in the court yard until 7:00 a.m. when people began to stir. The matron at the women's dorm helped me to get my bearings and allowed me to leave my belongings with her while I found my own dorm and room and got myself checked in. I was disappointed to find that I would be sharing a room with four other people.

I was very frightened of not making it in college. The registration process was terrifying. There were long lines, and I was concerned about making the correct choices in courses. I also worried about whether I would have enough money for room and board for the year after paying tuition. I soon found a job cleaning offices to make some extra money. Because my dad had just retired, he could not afford to give me much financial help. I was constantly frightened about my grades. Even though I seemed to be doing well in my classes, I didn't know for sure what my grades would turn out to be. To make matters worse, two of my roommates were not studious and detracted, I felt, from my chances of being successful.

My messages from home seemed promising. My siblings seemed to want me to do well, and my mother was encouraging by asking me how I was doing. But when I went home for the Christmas break, I experienced a set back. My family constantly said things like “Now that you’re in college, you think you’re hot stuff.” They constantly denigrated the college going experience even though they had no direct knowledge of it. They kept reminding me that I had not done so well before and that I had gotten a D in German. No one praised me for being the second person in my immediate family to earn a high school degree, even though I was one of the youngest children. No one said one word of praise about my being the first in the history of either my mother’s or my father’s family ever to go to college.

I believe I was the first Hispanic student ever to attend Shaw University, and I was definitely the only one at the institution at the time. But everyone treated me just great. I felt a part of things from the beginning. I remember being at orientation my freshman year and feeling a connection with the student body. Here were all these people from all over the country. Some were struggling academically and financially, just like I was. There were high school valedictorians among us, urbanites, and others who had never before been off the farm. The college made a genuine effort during orientation to make everyone feel at home. Each freshman had been paired off with a junior counselor, an upperclassman, who would tell us about all the different processes that we needed to know about and would help us to carry out all the new responsibilities that we were facing. They would recommend tutors if we needed them, or they would tutor us themselves for free. I remember that Dr. Adams, Dean of Students, addressed us at the orientation meeting. She was an older, very fair skinned black woman who wore her hair in a French roll. She had large lips, and she probably tried to make

them appear even larger by applying lots of extremely red lipstick. She looked out at us from the stage of Greenleaf Auditorium and said, "Umm. . . umm. . . umm. . . . My people are all the colors of the rainbow!" There were two hundred to three hundred freshmen in the auditorium, and they ranged in color from black to white. Mrs. Adams talked about how beautiful we all were and what potential we had and how confident in us she was and how happy and honored she was to be there to address us. She was obviously proud of her identity, and I believe that all of us who heard her felt proud of ourselves, too.

I had both good teachers at Shaw and others who had the attitude that we would make it on our own with no help from them or we would not make it. I learned a great deal in history because I liked it, a lot in English, a lot in science, and even a lot in math, in spite of my initial belief that I could not do it. Most teachers were caring, and small classes allowed them to get to know the students. This was during the sixties and most students had a sense of purpose, both inside and outside the classroom. Everyone I knew was involved to some degree in the Civil Rights Movement. We used to demonstrate in front of segregated establishments such as lunch counters and movie houses. Hundreds of nicely turned out college students would approach the ticket booth at movie theatres and ask for a ticket. The students were instructed always to line up and approach in pairs. Their requests to purchase a ticket were always refused unless I or a white looking black were the ones asking. We would buy a ticket, go in, stay a little while, and come out and join the line again. The second time we approached the same attendant, we would be refused. We wanted to show that skin color can fool anyone foolish enough to make decisions based upon it. Perhaps more important, we wanted to show that sharing a theatre with someone who is black poses no

harm, as a result of that person's blackness, to anyone in the theatre. And we also wanted to show -- and this may be the most important lesson of all -- that we weren't tired and we would keep coming back until justice was served.

I left Shaw for economic reasons. At the end of my sophomore year, I knew I did not have the money to return that next fall. That summer, I got a job working for a federal program, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and began paying rent, as my family required, in order to live at home. Since they knew that I had run out of money, they fully expected me to continue working full time and to continue making contributions toward the upkeep of the family. I, on the other hand, was frantically trying to think of an alternative.

The church had started a study club so that kids whose parents could not help them with their school work would have a place to go for tutoring. I asked Buffy and a Hispanic woman who worked at the study club if they knew of any scholarships that I might apply for. The Hispanic woman knew about ASPIRA, an organization developed to help Puerto Rican kids get to college. I went down town to talk with the people at ASPIRA. I explained to them that I wanted to become a teacher so that I could work with children much like I had been in an effort to make their learning experiences less difficult and more meaningful. I explained how I had gotten through my first two years of college, and ASPIRA gave me a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse. The university gave me a work-study position where I could work for twenty hours a week to pay for my room and board. If I worked thirty hours a week, I could earn money towards my tuition as well. For me this was incredible good luck. LaCrosse was trying to attract more minorities to the campus. There were only

two or three Hispanics at LaCrosse the whole time I was there. I didn't mind. I was just grateful for the chance to salvage my dream of earning a college degree.

The bus trip from New York to Wisconsin seemed interminable, but after my experience getting to Shaw, I was prepared for anything. I arrived at LaCrosse, found other students who were going to the campus, and, knowing exactly where I should be dropped off, shared a cab to my dorm. The student body was comprised almost totally of whites with a sprinkling of Native Americans. The college had no systems in place to ease my transition to life on campus or to enhance my chances for success. However, in the elementary education department, there were two teachers to whom their students were everything. One was a rather crusty old woman, but I had encountered a professor much like her at Shaw, and I knew that her bark was more likely to presage a nip than a real bite. She took a special interest in me, helping me to make informed decisions about which courses I should take and how I should go about becoming successful at the university. I am indebted to her because, in some ways, UW -- LaCrosse was a cold and alien place.

When I was in college, my self confidence grew with each year that I completed successfully. After my first year at Shaw University, the state of New York awarded me the Regents diploma. I believe that Mr. Pellman, my junior high school counselor and English teacher, had arranged to have that done because I had succeeded at college in spite of my Regents score in math. It seems silly that receiving the Regents diploma from the state should have meant so much to me. But it did. It said that I was college material and that I was no longer defined by that poor math test score.

I had planned to return to New York City to teach in the public school system when I graduated from college in 1967. I was recruited, however, by the Waukegan, Illinois, public schools. The district was experiencing a steady influx of Spanish speaking children that the schools were not prepared to serve. I knew that strides in meeting the needs of such children were being made in New York, but here was an area where the pertinent issues were not being addressed. So I moved to Waukegan and began teaching children for whom English was the second language.

I noticed that the students were learning English but without the academic content that they needed, so when the state allocated funds for the establishment of bilingual programs in 1971, I wrote a proposal to acquire funds for a program in Waukegan. I elicited the help of community members in convincing the Board of Education to support the program. I also used their help in screening teachers for the bilingual classes. I found that working with parents helped me to do a better job of helping the kids and the community. For instance, I would notice at school that kids were wearing summer clothing and inadequate outer wear in the dead of winter because their parents were new arrivals or down on their luck and unable to manage. Sometimes parents had problems with landlords or with finding a job, and the welfare of the children would be compromised. I began intervening by finding out which local agencies could help these people and by getting the people in contact with the agencies. Often I would drive parents to agencies such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, and I would translate once I got them there. The Red Cross was very helpful to people who needed a place to stay or clothes to wear after a house fire. I have high praise for the Salvation Army where people could get recycled clothes, furniture, and household utensils

whenever they needed them. The Salvation Army thrift shop allowed parents to maintain their dignity by paying a little for their selections if they could afford to do so. Because the schools were and remain concerned about the health of all students, they had to bar children from attending if they had not received the proper immunizations or the required physical examinations by a given date. Sometimes children would not be allowed in school because they had not met the school's health requirements, and the Health Department consistently came to their aid when I would call them. Organizations such as the Puerto Rican Society and the G.I. Forum, an association of Mexican Americans who are veterans, were very effective in getting Latino parents involved in helping their communities. Almost everyone that I encountered who received help from social agencies proved time and again that they had more than given back to the community what the community had given to them.

A case in point is a family of ten -- eight children and two parents -- who came to Waukegan from their home country under the sponsorship of a relative. Once they arrived, the relative moved to Chicago and left them in a practically empty apartment with no employment, little money, no knowledge of English, and no prospects for the future. The father was dejected at not being able to find a job and, after a short time, left his family and returned to their homeland. I took the mother to food pantries, to the Department of Children and Family Services, to agencies and churches that would give the family clothing. All of those eight children finished high school, and several went on to earn college degrees. The eldest child is a social worker in Waukegan.

I have found that working with people provides countless opportunities to add meaning to my life by helping others. I remember discovering that a parent who was

volunteering to work at her children's school had been a teacher in her country but was not certified to teach in Illinois. She was working part time in a laundry or a factory on the days that she was not volunteering. I had helped to draft legislation for a transitional bilingual teaching certificate which had been approved by the state. The purpose of the transitional certificate was to allow teachers who had trained under the normal or two-year system, as well as those whose credentials were earned in another country, to teach for six years in a bilingual program if they passed the English proficiency exam. During the six-year grace period, the teacher would be required to complete the courses necessary to gain the regular Illinois teaching certificate. I suggested that the parent acquire a transitional certificate, and I subsequently hired her as a bilingual teacher. In order to do so, I had to translate her credentials and submit them to the state. She was a wonderful teacher, as were many others whom I was able to help to enter the teaching profession in much the same way. While some states remained unable to meet the needs of their growing Spanish speaking student populations, we were facilitating the certification of bilingual teachers who had earned their college degrees and received their teacher training in their native countries of Puerto Rico, Honduras, Mexico, Cuba, Columbia, Chile, and Venezuela. There were times when the state would not approve the transitional certification, and I would have to appeal the decision, especially regarding teachers from Cuba who had not been able to bring all their credentials with them when they escaped the Castro regime. But in the end, our efforts were never unsuccessful, and the children, by gaining excellent, loving instructors, have been the benefactors.

I have had the opportunity during my life to work with all kinds of students. As the principal of a junior high school, I found that some students were spending too much of their time at school unproductively in detention hall. Their infractions included actions such as skipping school, being disruptive during class, and being tardy to class or to school an excessive number of times. Discussions with students who were in trouble and with instructors seemed to reveal that students who have not completed their assignments feel vulnerable in the classroom and are more likely to exhibit undesirable behavior so that they will be removed from a setting where they are not going to be successful. The faculty and I designed and implemented a plan to enhance student success. First, we put in place a system of encouragements that would build community among students, faculty, and staff even as it rewarded the vast majority of students for their responsible behavior. Dances, movies, cook outs, and special trips were school-wide activities for everyone who had stayed out of trouble.

The second prong of our plan entailed the teachers' covering detention hall after school every day. Teachers whose students were in detention would provide the work that needed to be done, and the teacher volunteers would make sure the students received the help that they needed to understand and complete their assignments. This proved to be an excellent program. It was not expensive, since the teachers volunteered their time. The numbers of students in detention were reduced, and we saw fewer repeat offenders. Students felt better about themselves, and many made improvements in their grades. Faculty members felt good about giving and about the greater academic involvement of former class offenders. The parents were very happy with the program. The effort was empowering for practically everyone involved.

I left the junior high school in Waukegan to take a central office position in a K-12 district in Aurora, Illinois. Here was a town with an Hispanic population even larger than Waukegan's. I had gotten my doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, so when I was offered the position in Aurora as Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, I was not sure I wanted to accept it. I wanted to influence what students were being taught. I envisioned the job in personnel as primarily focusing on contract negotiations, employee discipline, and sessions with lawyers both in and out of the court room. I took the job because the Superintendent reminded me that I would be able to influence, perhaps more than any other person, the quality of teachers hired by the district. Immediately I remembered my own teachers from my K-12 days. I had forgotten much of the content that I had learned, but I had not forgotten the teachers who had been kind to their students, who had believed that they could learn, who had demonstrated a conviction that every child in the classroom is a unique manifestation of God's best idea.

No matter how happy I am in my job, I have a tendency to look around to see what else is out there that I may need to do. That's how I happened to come to Oak Terrace Elementary School. Before I left Aurora, I had interviewed for a few school superintendencies and had actually been offered one. For some reason, I had also applied for one principalship. The job was in an elementary school in the poor area of one of the most affluent school districts in northern Illinois. Sixty percent of the students are Hispanic. When I was invited for a second interview, I decided that I would go and have a look at the school. I entered the building just as the first bell was about to ring, and little kids were scurrying to get to their classrooms. Three of them spied me, and, excellent hosts that they were, hurried toward me,

their huge smiles welcoming. “May I help you?” they inquired, almost in unison. They must have been about six or seven years old, since two of them had lost their front teeth. I was hooked. Here were first or second grade ambassadors carrying out the principles of good customer service with more warmth and skill than is exhibited by trained professionals in some colleges. In my job as Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, I had read stories to classes and otherwise involved myself with the teaching and learning process as often as I could. But here was the potential for more immediate and continual participation. I was offered the job and I took it.

My work at Oak Terrace allows me to observe students, detect their needs as whole persons, and do whatever I can to help them grow into the fine citizens that they can all become. We have begun a dual language program which teaches English dominant and Spanish dominant kids in both languages, beginning in the earliest grades. We ascribe to the philosophy that when it comes to knowledge and love, more is better. We want children who speak Spanish to know that their knowledge of the language is an asset, not something to be ashamed of, and that learning English well will put them far ahead of the game. We want children who speak English to know that becoming fluent in Spanish is a valuable skill that will expand their opportunities in many ways. No matter what a child’s first language may be, we want to help them to learn English while retaining a complete and healthy respect for their native tongue. I try to learn greetings, at least, in the many different languages of our students. If we are truly what we speak, then it behooves me, as it does the children, to be *and speak* all that I can.

CHAPTER VII

OONA FA KNO WHA OONA CUM FRUM (YOU SHOULD KNOW WHERE YOU CAME FROM)

When I was growing up on the coast of northeastern North Carolina, my family never, ever traveled south. Almost every sleepy town lay only ten or eleven miles from the next, but if they were south of Merry Hill, we never got to see them. The exception was Wilson because my aunt and uncle lived there, and we started going southwest to Raleigh when my sister began attending college there. I remember asking my father when I was quite young why he never took us south. "We live in the south," he said somewhat reasonably. "But if you want to go further south, when I get rich I'll buy a helicopter and take you over the rest of it real low. Barring that, you can wait 'til you grow up and take yourself."

I took my first trip to South Carolina when I went to St. Helena Island for my interview with Lula in 1996. What surprised me was the depth of disturbance that I felt upon landing on South Carolina soil. I was painfully aware that the Confederate flag still waved above the state house in Columbia. Of course, I understood that the legacies of slavery were not exclusive to South Carolina, or to the south, for that matter. But by flying its most representative symbol of the Confederacy over its most symbolic representative of its government and people, South Carolina seemed to sanction those legacies in a blatant and shameful way. How would I feel, I asked myself, when I came face to face with blacks whose

language and customs, through geographic isolation, were more connected to Africa and to the era of slavery than were my own assimilated language and customs? Would my anger about the past overshadow my pride in the present? In an effort to “deal with” my new locale, I took out my log book and recorded the following statements:

1. This land is no redder with blood than any other land up and down the shores of the Atlantic.

2. The hopelessness of slavery -- the sweat and toil and tears -- surely afforded outbursts of creativity, slants of light to pierce the darkness of oppression.

3. Time disperses the intensity of suffering.

4. Against the backdrop of humankind's experience, our recent past is a minuscule blip upon history's screen.

I would learn later, from Lula, that the yoke of slavery was lifted on St. Helena in 1861, way before the end of the Civil War. “That blessed event frames the history of the island,” she told me. In a way, Lula's story became my license to be at home in the south. Lula, 74, is a volunteer at Penn Cultural Center on St. Helena Island, South Carolina.

The Confederates were expecting the Union Army to come into Fort Sumter, in the Charleston area, but they bypassed Fort Sumter and came into Port Royal Sound, only a few miles from here. They knew that the only way the South existed financially was by selling to England sea island cotton, indigo, corn, and rice. In return, the South received money and guns from England. So to keep the flow of commerce out, the Union came in and blockaded

Port Royal Sound. Well, it was on Sunday morning, in November of 1861. They began bombarding in Hilton Head early that morning, and by one o'clock, the Confederates had conceded defeat. The Union had their work cut out for them, though. They had a lot to get done, and they were fighting in the upper areas, too. But it was all over, here on the island, and immediately the government sent down officers to live at a plantation house that is still here. The Secretary of the Interior came down, as did the Secretary of the Treasury. They came to take over the fields of cotton and other produce that were being grown here on St. Helena and to get them ready for market. Well, the Union officers arrived and found 8,000 enslaved people. There were only a very few who were free, only a few who could read and write. Maybe some who lived in the homes of the slave owners or were servants who took care of the white school children had learned something from a young charge who would show pictures and words to their mammies. But there were 8,000, maybe 10,000, out here who couldn't read or write.

This was a problem. And not only that, the Union soldiers couldn't understand the blacks of this area because they spoke a language called Gullah. Now, Gullah is a combination of English and Krio, which was the official language of Sierra Leone. The slaves that lived here came from Sierra Leone and other coastal West African countries. Between Liberia and Sierra Leone, the northern part, there was a group called Golas. And then there were the people coming from Angola. As slaves, these two groups converged in this area and in coastal Georgia. To distinguish the difference between them, one would say, "I'm Gola Lula," and the other one would say, "I'm Angola Sandria." They spoke different languages and couldn't understand each other, so they created Gullah, a new language with which they could

communicate. The name, Gullah, is perhaps a form of Gola and Angola. And you can see the difference between the African language of Krio, the English, and the Gullah. Consider the English and Gullah of the proverb, "If you don't know where you are going, you should know where you came from." In Gullah, we say, "Ef oona na kno wha oona da gwine, oona fa kno wha oona cum frum." Another example of Gullah is that we say, "Ef oona na kno usa oona de go, oona fa kno usa oona commin." In English that is, "If you don't know which side you are on, you should know which side you came from."

The Union's solution to the problems of illiteracy among the blacks and the language barrier between the blacks and the Union officers was Penn School, built on the Oaks Plantation here on St. Helena in 1862. Penn was the first school in the South started for blacks. The founder was Laura M. Towne who was sent from Philadelphia by the Freedman's Association. A few months later, Ellen Murray was sent from Philadelphia to join Laura Towne. The Freedmen's Association, active in Boston as well as Philadelphia, was a group of humanitarians, mostly Quakers, but others, too, such as Unitarians, who had for years been saying, "It's not fair what you're doing to those human beings. You're dehumanizing them, and they are human. They are not property." But the slave owners had not listened. So when the war came, the white people were afraid and fled the island. There had only been about fifty of them on St. Helena. One reason there were so few is because of the climate here. It's awfully hot in the summer. Also, whites contracted malaria fever from mosquito bites. The blacks were used to the heat and mosquitoes in Africa. Even though they were third and fourth generation here by the time of the Civil War, they still carried the traits of resistance. Right now, if a mosquito bites me, I will probably rub it, but I do not get any swelling from

mosquito bites.

So the Yankees started this little school here in 1862 to help all these newly freed blacks. The first day they had nine students attend. The next day they had nineteen. At the end of the second week, they had over forty people in one room. Everybody wanted to learn. Parents came to see what these white people were teaching their children, and the parents wanted to learn, too. A powerful incentive for the adults to learn was that they could purchase land if they could sign their names to the deeds. And they wanted to have land. The government did sell ten acres, or maybe fifteen, to whoever could afford it. As the blacks could afford more, they were allowed to purchase it. Because of the over crowdedness in the school, Laura Towne appealed to the Freedmen's Association asking that they move the school across the street to the white people's church. The whites had never had the numbers to fill the first floor of their church, but they had filled the balcony with the so called black leaders among the slaves. The slave owners knew that the Africans believed in following their leaders, so they brought these blacks in to hear their sermons for purposes of indoctrination and control. The blacks were ordered to go back and tell the others on the plantations that they were to obey the whites, their masters, just as they were to obey God. But now these God forsaken whites had forsaken their church, and Penn School moved in. At this time, a black girl, Charlotte Forten, came from Philadelphia to help with the teaching.

Charlotte Forten's father was a sail maker, a man of means. Charlotte had been educated at home because her father had not wanted his daughter attending a segregated school. When she finished elementary school, he sent her to friends in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and she went on to college. When she finished college, she applied to teach

at Penn, and they did not accept her, for even the Yankees were not color blind. But a few years later, following the instructions of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier who was her friend, Charlotte reapplied and was accepted. So she came to St. Helena, and as the first black instructor at Penn, she taught with Laura Towne and Ellen Murray in the church and in the little study house.

Charlotte Forten was a musician. She played beautiful music, and the blacks loved it. We blacks, you know, will sing and sway to the birds' tunes. She invited John Greenleaf Whittier down and asked him to write a song for the people of the island. He wrote the "St. Helena Hymn," and the blacks loved that, too. Soon the school became overcrowded again, and three other buildings were acquired. The blacks moved these buildings and joined them together. The land that was used was purchased from one of the few blacks who were already free. He sold the school ten acres, and when he died he left additional property to Penn. Not wanting him to be a slave, his master had given him his papers so that he could have the chance to migrate. By contrast, most slave owners in these parts were afraid that their slaves *would* migrate in the middle of the night, following the drinking gourd north. You see, Harriet Tubman was in Beaufort. She had a business there, along with the Underground Railroad. They tried to catch her, but she was too shrewd for them even though she could neither read nor write. "Mother wit" is what they call her gifts.

The gifts of Penn School to the people of St. Helena went far beyond the gift of literacy. In addition to carrying out her teaching duties, Laura Towne started midwifery training at Penn because there were probably 3,000 women here having babies. Of course, the slave owners had been breeding the slaves because every slave was money, and the white men

had also made mistresses of black girls. Laura Towne taught the blacks good health habits, and they just loved her. I remember that my grandmother spoke of her with reverence and stated proudly that Laura Towne never turned away from the people. She came down here and stayed over forty years. She never returned to her home to live, and when she died, the black women would not let an undertaker or anyone else touch her body. They prepared her for burial themselves.

When Penn School closed in 1948, all the supplies and furnishings belonged to the trustees who let their friends come in and take whatever they wanted. When the museum opened, word was circulated that the school was looking for artifacts, so many of the items that had been taken from Penn were given back. I am so happy about the renovation of Penn School. Penn gave me my start, made college an option for me, and made my present comfortable life possible. For every student who ever matriculated at Penn and for posterity, the school deserves to be preserved and its role in the education of islanders deserves to be remembered.

Though we may now be middle class, those who went to college from this area were generally poor people. Some of them in the latter years were the children of the Penn workers, and they had more income than the average citizen here on St. Helena. My mother came from a family of six here on the island. And, previous to that, her mother was a Penn student. Instead of going on to graduate, during her junior year she got married. The custom here on the island was that it was good for your daughter to go as far in school as she could, but if an offer of marriage came along, it was better that she get married and let the husband provide. So, even though my grandmother wanted to finish school, her mother told her to go

ahead and get married. My grandmother was upset that she had to do that. She was a student of both Laura Towne and Ellen Murray, and she had been powerfully influenced by them to complete her education.

My own mother completed the public elementary school here. She left school and went to work because she saw the need. Her father had died when she was three years old, leaving her mother with five children. The baby was six months old. My grandmother later remarried, but she had two more children, and work was hard to find.

My mother's family made their living by farming, raising animals, etc. But to feed a family of nine was difficult. So when Mother was twelve years old, she went to Savannah to work. She would stand on a crate to do the washing in the house where she was employed. When she was fifteen, she got a job working for a family named Foster. In the summer, the Fosters would go to Florida, and mother would come back here and dig white potatoes on Cane Island. She was industrious and believed in getting the most and the best that she could. She worked hard all her life, and in her declining years, she retired and moved back to St. Helena.

During the early thirties, Mother came home for a few years and we all lived with my grandparents. Mother worked for the MacDonalds in the house that had belonged to Laura Towne. Her employers were people of wealth, and while she worked for them, Mother took us out of the county school and put us in Penn. I first went to Penn in the second grade. I attended during the summer session after the county school, which ran from October to March, was closed for the term so children could work in the fields. Mother wanted me to go to Penn, so I went that summer, but the distance was too far. If the older children were late

for school, they would run and I couldn't keep up with them. I didn't go to Penn again until two years later when Mother took all five of us out of the county school and sent us to Penn.

My grandmother had taught all of us to read, write, and do multiplication by the time we started school. That's how I got to skip the first year. My teacher was also our Sunday School teacher, and she knew I was ahead of the other children, so I skipped primary, which would be called kindergarten today.

Education at Penn was quite different from the usual fare at a county school. While at both schools we had Christian studies, in the county schools we also had prayer, music, and scripture before we began classes. The curriculum at Penn was different, too. We had four days of regular classes and one day of industrial and home arts. The county schools had neither the time nor the money to provide such studies. When I went to county school, there were two rooms, with grades three through six in one room and grades primary through second in the other. There was no lunch room. You had to carry your lunch or go home if you lived close by. We had a stove in each of the classrooms, and the boys had to get the wood and start the fire on cold days. In primary to second grade, we had long benches and a long table that we sat around. There would be forty or more students in a room. The situation was not conducive to learning, but the teachers were good teachers, and the children did learn. If they did not learn, they were not passed to the next grade.

The county did not provide books to the county schools, so the parents had to buy whatever books their children had. Most people didn't have money, so if they had three or four children in school, they couldn't buy the books. Students would have to "look on" with someone else who had a book. In my case, there were two children in the family ahead of me,

so I had their books. Books were passed down. You had to buy a tablet, your own pencils -- and the parents just didn't have the money. If you had a brother or sister in the same room, you would write first and then you'd give them the pencil and let them write. A lot of children didn't have lunch, and food is important when a child is growing and trying to learn. I think about it, how we struggled. Beaufort County did very little for the education of a black child. We are the products of Penn School and its teachings. Almost nothing came to us from the county.

There were only a few white children living on the island when I was a girl. There was not even a busload, but they were given a bus and transported to Beaufort to school. There were no white schools on the island, but there were eight or nine black county schools here. There were no county high schools on the island, and no bus to take black students from the island to the black county school in Beaufort, the Beaufort Training School, called Shanklin School. Most of the black children on the Beaufort side of the bridge went there, but there were two other schools, a Baptist church school for girls and Robert Smalls Elementary School.

The county made no provisions for the education of black children on the island after they completed eighth grade. In order to attend a county high school, the children would have had to walk from the island to Beaufort. From where I live here on Frogmore, it is eleven miles one way to Beaufort. From Land's End, it is twenty miles to Beaufort. From Coffin's Point, where the beach is, the students had to walk nine miles just to get to Penn. Black students were expected to walk to school, but the island is eighteen miles long!

Sometimes the parents would try to take the children to school, or the boys would ride

the horse, but the parents needed the horse for farming. And a parent transporting children in a buggy or a gig or a cart would have room for only so many. There were only four or five blacks on the island who owned a car, and they were the doctor, storekeepers, and the undertaker. In 1931, two of the Penn trustees each sent a bus to transport the children to school. The trustees were, of course, white people from the North. The black families didn't have money to give to the school. Penn was a white supported institution, and as the Lord touched the hearts of the northern whites, they sent things down here, including clothing by the barrels. If there was a needy family, they would be given clothing. And those who could afford to pay ten cents did so, which let them feel that they were not given everything, that they had contributed something. At Penn we paid a yearly fee of five dollars, which later went to six. The first graders paid one dollar, just to let the parents feel that they were doing something, that they were not on the receiving end without giving something back.

When I lived on the island as a child, blacks did not have a lot of latitude in terms of money, mobility, or interacting with those from the mainland, but we could take the boat that came from Savannah down here to Crow's Bridge on Frogmore. The boat would leave Savannah for Daufuskie Island and Hilton Head and would come here because there were an oyster factory and a shell mill here. We also had a large general store. The Boat would stop at Clear Bridge and go on to the Yard, and then on to Beaufort. They would bring cargo, and they would take cargo. The blacks here on the island would take bushels of potatoes, okra, and greens on the boat to Savannah. They would stay at the foot of the river and sell their produce, often sending some of it to their family members who were living in Savannah. Until 1927, when they built the bridge from Beaufort to the island, people had to row across the

water to get to and from St. Helena.

In very many ways, Penn School helped to improve life here on the island. Penn was always community oriented. People from the community worked in the Penn buildings, on the grounds, and on the Penn farms to help support their families. With its sixty acres of farm land, Penn could grow food for the boarding department and for the day workers and students. We had a few students who were not from the island but from Sheldon, Hilton Head, and maybe Gardens Corners and Garnett. Those few had to stay in the boarding department because distance dictated it. When Penn students reached the eleventh grade, all of them had to go into the boarding department to learn the social graces. Because most of us were taught the facts of life by our grandparents, we didn't know some of the things that we should have been told, things that our parents certainly treated like secrets. So Mr. Lewis, the chemistry and biology teacher, and Mr. Cates, the math teacher, would talk with the boys, while the girls were enlightened by the nurse and the matron of the dormitory.

The girls did all the cleaning at Penn, including the laundry. It was my job to start the fire in the laundry each morning, and I was lucky to get a job. The matron would walk me over to the laundry, make sure there was nobody in the building, lock the door so nobody could come in, and I would start the fire. She would leave, but she could look right across from her station into the building where I was. The boys would be getting ready to go into the fields, and they'd be out there milking before coming in to breakfast. After breakfast, the boys would do the plowing, mostly with mules. Men and women from the community who worked at Penn would come to do their various jobs. Penn brought the community together and boosted the financial condition in many households.

The school was also responsible for improved post- and pre-natal care on the island by training midwives. The midwifery program at Penn prepared women with a viable occupation. Of course, there were times when the people could not pay in money for the delivery of a baby. They would give the midwife a pig or two bushels of corn or maybe potatoes. These goods, though not money, supplemented the midwives' budgets; they could eat what they had been paid, or they could sell it. I know that Dr. Bailey, the island's only doctor until around 1950, would be paid a bushel of peas, whatever people had because they didn't have any money. Yet, they showed that they knew they were indebted to him and they were trying to do something about it. Penn taught us about food service, and in the community the Home Economics teacher was also the Home Demonstration agent from Beaufort County. She taught all our grandparents how to put food in jars and in cans. And we had that food to eat during winter when things were lean.

Growing up, I remember that Mother started telling me that she wanted me to become a trained nurse like Miss Margaret, the daughter of the rich white family that she worked for on the island. So I grew up with that. And Miss Margaret would tell me, "You have to finish school, Lula, and you have to go to nursing school." I was all for it, and I was always a B+ student. I was valedictorian all the way up, even in college. But I didn't become the valedictorian at graduation because I missed a year of college life. What happened is grandmother's house burned. My little brother had gone to school, and he probably left fire in the house, and the wind I don't know what happened, but my grandmother was working and there was no fire department. People ran over, but it was too late. My grandmother was crying that she had no place to live, so Mother said, "Lula, you just have

to stay out of school to help me raise the money to build Mama a house.”

No one at Voorhees, the college that I attended in Denmark, South Carolina, wanted to see me leave. In terms of helping me and others to earn the money for college expenses by providing work/study opportunities, Voorhees was excellent. But they could not help me to pay my college bills and at the same time earn enough money to replace my grandmother’s house. I’ll never forget how upset they were that I had to leave. I was the best student in my class, and there was nothing the college could do to prevent the interruption of my education. “You can come back, Lula, and finish up next year. The important thing is to come back and finish. We’ll help you to catch up if by some chance you fall behind,” they told me. Leaving college was a bitter pill that I had to take, and I endeavored to swallow it without a gloomy countenance.

My mother was working in New York, and I got a job there doing domestic work. We were lucky enough to buy a house on the island, and the community moved it to my grandmother’s property. After we got it paid off, I had to save money for college. That summer I “slept in” out at Long Beach. I saved almost every penny and returned to college the next year. But so much that I needed to know for my classes during my senior year was dependent on what I had studied in my junior year. I had forgotten so much while I was working. I hadn’t had time to study. I hadn’t had books with me. My books had all been destroyed. I had one book. I studied as hard as I could my senior year, but I had lost ground. I’m not sure anyone appreciated how hard I struggled because I was still passing all my classes. But, you know, God is good. My mother was a kosher cook, so she was able to get a good job in New York. When I returned to college, I knew that I would have some

monetary support from Mother. I also worked at college, of course. We were taught at Penn, like Booker T. Washington said, that anything worth having is worth working for. Our teachers who were islanders and came back to the island to teach encouraged us to work as hard as we could to get a good education. That's where real opportunity lies, in caring encouragement.

When I finished college, I came back to the island and taught one year in the county schools. When school started in August, we had to go to the county school in Beaufort to get the books for the island students. They were all used books. Never a new one. We got what the whites had finished with. There were no supplemental books. When the children finished reading *Dick and Jane* or whatever, there was nothing more for them to read. I had worked for whites in New York, and they threw away books and the children's nursery rhymes. I had shipped a trunk load of them here. They would tell me, "Take these books! Take these books!" And magazines! Nobody here subscribed to magazines except the Penn School people and a few whites. My aunt was working for the mail carrier whose wife was French and not prejudiced at all, even though she couldn't allow me to sit at the table. She would save the newspapers for me. I would get magazines from her like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal* to use in making visual aids for the children. I would give the children the magazines to cut things out of. "Find a picture with a horse or some other animal you know," I would tell them. I had grades two and three. I had to keep the third graders busy while I was teaching the second graders, and vice versa. It was hard, but I was vitally interested in the possibilities for the children's future.

As much had been done for me. My teachers at Penn had let us pursue learning and

had encouraged us to do the things that we were best in while improving in those where we did poorly. I loved to read, and I'd borrow a book from the Penn library and finish it that day. I'm glad my daughter inherited my love of reading, and so did her son. Teachers appreciated my reading, so students used to call me the teacher's pet. But I wasn't really. I was simply a poor but considerate child.

My family was indeed poor, but we always had food. My grandfather farmed, built houses, and did whatever other jobs he could get. He raised animals and poultry. He worked as a night watchman at Penn for a while, so there was never a day when there was nothing in the box to eat, even if it was just a boiled potato. But money -- that was the catch. My little brother knew how to operate the tractor at Penn, and he decided he wasn't going to continue in school. He said he wanted to work and help our grandmother, whom we called Mama. He would bring home that two dollars a week that he would make. He'd keep fifty cents and give the rest to Mama. That would help buy kerosene or fill a gap someplace else. But there was always that desire to learn among all of us children. I think my grandmother instilled it in us. My mother did, too. She said, "Lula, go on to school. Don't make a mistake." So many girls became pregnant and dropped out of school, and that was a terrible disgrace.

When I went to Voorhees, I felt prepared for college in all areas except algebra. We didn't have algebra at Penn after ninth grade, so there was a gap between high school and college algebra. And that has been the weakness of all Penn graduates. Even though they went to Hampton and other colleges, they didn't do well in algebra. But Penn students were far advanced in other disciplines. The President at Voorhees had been Superintendent of Penn, so they knew what to expect of a Penn student. They would say, "You know better.

You know the training you had on St. Helena.” Penn students did well at college. The transition from high school to college was relatively easy for us. We had positive self images, we knew how to study, we had a sense of direction, and the faculty were tough but supportive, just as those at Penn had been. In terms of the adjustment to life away from home, we were already somewhat acclimated to that because Penn had required that we live on campus after the sophomore year.

Penn students were encouraged to go on to college if they could afford it. Scholarships were not available to us. We rented our books at Voorhees, and, lucky for me, the lady who ran the laundry learned that Penn girls knew how to do men’s shirts. I got an afternoon job in the laundry. I was also a waitress at Voorhees, just as I had been at Penn. Mother would send my board money to Voorhees, but it was a struggle for us. She went without a lot of things so that I could have. That’s why I told my mother she would never want, she would never suffer. “Anything,” I told her, “Do what you want to do, as long as it’s right. Don’t worry about money. I got plenty of money.” I didn’t always tell my husband, but I’d slip twenty dollars in a letter to my mother, or I would put a fifty dollar bill in when I was staff and did overtime. I would always send my mother something. She’d say, “Lula, don’t send anything.” I bought all of her clothes. I just wanted my mother to have the things she missed so that I could get an education.

After teaching a year on the island, I went to New York to work because that’s where the opportunities were. I was hired as a receptionist for two doctors at Mt. Sinai Hospital. This job paid three times my teaching salary on St. Helena. And Dr. Landsdacher encouraged me. He said, “Lula, if you want to go to nursing school, since you said that was your

ambition, I'll teach you anesthesiology." He'd tell me, "Lula, the opportunities for blacks are so hard. They will just do anything to keep a black person down. But don't let it get to you, and don't be bitter because if you hold bitterness, then you are as bad as they are." He would give me extra money, but he'd tell me, "Now, don't tell my wife." He was a little, short Jewish man--such a good person. His wife was an anesthesiologist, too. I was hoping he would be there years later when I had my operation, but when I went in and inquired about him, the doctor told me that he had died six months before. He said, "You knew Dr. Landsdacher? He was a sweetheart of a doctor."

My real profession in New York was at Macy's. I began by working with customer accounts, but then the union asked me to be a shop steward. Later on I became Section Leader. I supervised forty girls from whom I was able to get very good work. When the union began managing Macy's credit union, they approached me about moving to a position there. I wasn't interested, but when my president told me that they needed me, I took the job. They sent me to Cornell University to take a course in credit union management. I had to learn the labor laws, but it was worth it because it exposed me to the living conditions of other people. The job heightened my caring spirit for other people. I felt that I was helping somebody, and I have always wanted to help others because somebody helped me. And I was able to help so many people when I was with the credit union. I could speak with people who were behind in their accounts, and I could make arrangements that would allow them to pay their debts without our having to involve an attorney or to garnish their checks.

I was supervisor of the credit representatives, and you would not believe some of the problems that I encountered. You see, white people do not always understand the problems

of black people because many whites have always had. And we didn't always have. To complicate matters, sometimes black employees would steal, they'd get fired, they'd try to scheme ways to return late from lunch because they were playing cards. And they'd get put on warnings. With warnings, you don't get your raises. If you're not getting raises, you're not going to move up. And Macy's could withhold raises legally. The employees would say, "Lula, at least you're fair." I'd say, "Yeah, but we all have to do better, and we can." And I'd try to help them understand how to do better. We had problems, but I got along with all the executives, everyone that I worked for.

During my credit union days, I began volunteering in the schools. I sponsored the Young People's Department as well as the Girls' Club in the community. We didn't have a club house, so the teenagers would hold meetings and study sessions in my home, with their parents' permission. After our meetings, I would take the girls home if they lived farther away than the next block. I would call parents and tell them that their children could be expected home in three or five minutes, whatever the case would be, if they were walking by themselves. And I would tell the boys in our group that they didn't fool around with the girls. "You're not a man; you can't support a child," I'd tell them. "You don't need a baby. Wait until you are married." They were afraid of Miss Lula, but they loved me, too.

I started baking pies because the boys loved homemade baked goods. We had an ice cream churn, and my mother would make ice cream and bake cakes for the children. I let the children dance in my apartment, and I would take them to museums and other places that their parents didn't take them. We would go roller skating and ice skating. I would take them to restaurants so the boys would learn to pull the chairs out for the girls. The boys had to

learn that they were to stand while the girls were being seated. I have a letter that one of the boys wrote to me about how much I did for him in his youth. How well he remembered me giving them a chance when nobody else would. "Our parents didn't have time. They didn't know a lot of the things that their children needed to learn," he wrote. I am proud that he became a very successful entrepreneur who currently makes about half a million dollars a year.

When the group of children grew too large for social events at my apartment, I spoke with my pastor about letting us use the fellowship hall at the church. "We are going to dance, Reverend, I'll tell you that right now," I said. I reminded the deacons that all of them danced when they were young, and they acquiesced. The children began earning money for special projects by holding dances and selling chicken dinners, which they cooked. We never asked the church for money. When the Youth Choir needed robes, the children raised the money to buy them. They made ice cream and sold it, along with dinners that the parents helped us with, in the yard of the church on Sundays. Then Pepsi-Cola opened up a club in the area, but by that time there were gangs and fighting encroaching upon our neighborhood.

Throughout the years that I did not live on the island, I always came back four or five times a year. So nine years ago when I was getting ready to move back for good, I had no anxieties about the "slow pace" of life on St. Helena. The retirement farewell held for me on my last day at Macy's was over by noon, the thirtieth of November, and I was on my way to my new home on St. Helena by three o'clock.

The first thing I did when I moved back to the island was join my church. Then I said I was going to rest and sleep for three months. But I stopped by Penn Center, and they had

just hired a new curator. She was from Hampton Institute, just out of college, and didn't know anybody on the island. She didn't know anything about St. Helena, so I volunteered to help her. I didn't know about archives and all that kind of work, but putting the pictures in order, working with the curator if someone came in from the community, introducing her to people, answering the phones while she did other things, staying at the library while she went to meetings, these things I could do. I began reading the literature that is at Penn, and I said, "This is beautiful!" I started digging back into the history of St. Helena. I learned it so I could tell the people when they came into the museum. I wanted to be knowledgeable. I already knew the history of Penn, but the history of St. Helena! I didn't know that much. And you never heard Gullah referred to in a proud and beautiful way. They had just called it the Negro dialect. Wouldn't call it Gullah. Other blacks would deride us as "rice eating Geechies" and would be insulted if they were mistaken for one of us. And we were veered away from Gullah. When we got to Penn, we couldn't say "ain't" or "gwine." Some students still said it because it was all they knew, but they had to change. No more, "I'm gwine" and "Dem people obah dere." "Let that tongue hit those teeth!" our Penn teachers would say. When I was teaching on the island, one day a little boy came excitedly to me and said, "Miss Lula, cum yonda! Cum yonda!" It took me a minute to realize that he was saying, "Look over there!" I taught those children the same way I was taught at Penn, that there are no such words as *cum yonda*.

I have learned so much about my beautiful language and culture, and I love to share it. The value of remembering "Cum yonda," the value of knowing its origin, the value of appreciating the struggle which fueled its generation--even as we learn standard English--are in direct opposition to the stigma of speaking Gullah or being a Geechie. When Bill Moyers

came to film his special on St. Helena Island, I was glad to share my knowledge and experience with him. I have learned so much! When I was a child, I would eat from a bag and throw the bag along the side of the road. I didn't know about spoiling the scenery. But years ago when I saw a group of people cleaning the highway in front of Penn, I became aware of the "Keep America Beautiful" initiative on the island, and I organized a group to service the area where I live. Some of us still clean the roadsides every day.

An important event in the preservation and dissemination of the island's culture is Heritage Days, an annual three-day celebration which brings ten to twelve thousand people to St. Helena. Heritage Days has been going on for sixteen years, but last night you heard people at the old time prayer meeting saying that we have to keep shouts alive, we have to keep the spirit alive. When I first moved back to the island, I was at a prayer meeting and noted that there was no shout as part of the service. "No, we don't shout anymore," a deacon told me. "It died out. And what do you know about shouting? They haven't shouted in your time." And I started clapping like this, that clapping that we do, and I started singing, "Abony, Abony, knock a bone fuh me . . ." And I started shouting, and he started singing and shouting right there. Well, people gathered around, and the great irony is that I approached some people in my age group and asked them if they would shout, so we shouted on the platform for Heritage Days. From that, we revived the praise house services. This has helped to renew interest in the old ways, and now shouting is a vital part of what gets done here, just as it was in the near and distant past. I am interested in getting more young people involved. Let them be taught how to shout along with singing the old, old songs.

You've seen how the Penn buildings are being restored, the site where Dr. King came

to plan his march on Washington, and the plans for further restoration. You know that I initiated the building project for community based functions of which the Laura M. Towne Park is a part. But we also have a Community Development Corporation to help get young people involved in the life of the island. We are going to put an incubator on the corner near the community park where we will help people to launch small businesses. We will have stalls in front of the buildings so people can come and sell their crafts. Home made quilts, ceramics, picture frames, cabinets, hand woven baskets, hand knitted fishing nets, paintings, carvings, all kinds of goods and opportunities will be open to the people. Hair salons, bake shops, and furniture refinishing will be available. People here can do so many creative things, and we want to expose their work to the public. The incubator will help those who are here and have saleable skills, as well as attract new talent to the area. I am so glad to be a part of all this because it gives me a chance to help.

Do you remember the woman I introduced you to who was my classmate both at Penn and when I was in college? One of her parents was a teacher at Penn. I will never forget the time when I didn't have a dress or shoes to wear to a special event at Voorhees. My friend's mother had sent her two new dresses. One she wore and the other, brand new, she insisted that I wear. Another friend of ours had shoes that she said were too small for her and she wanted me to wear them and stretch them to her size. So I wore my friends' finery feeling like a princess, not a beggar, because of their genuine desire to help me. As I look back over my life, that day still registers as a special one. I think about those friends. I think about them all the time. I could never forget the things they did for me when we were going to school and I was poor and they were not.

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

A SENSE OF SELF: A CONDITION FOR SELFLESSNESS

The New York City Public Schools had a program called Music Appreciation. From first through third grades, my class would be taken into a room and be told about the music and to imagine things. I remember the teacher writing the word Shrimmerai³ on the board, meaning The Swan by Schumann or Schubert. I was in second grade. From that time on, I have just loved classical music. Teachers don't know the profound effect they can have on students. I never went back and told these teachers, "You made my life rich, oh, and you made it wonderful!"

Ken

In this study, I set out to answer three basic research questions. First, I wanted to identify those family and life experiences which contribute to the matriculation and subsequent educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. Second, I aimed to identify college specific experiences -- both in- and out-of-class -- which contribute to the educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. And third, I wanted to discover how these various experiences affect students, particularly in terms of how they influence students' decisions to become educational or social activists and on how they live their lives and affect others as agents of change.

To answer these questions, in the following three chapters, I present an analysis centered around themes common to the seventeen cases in this study. Each theme illuminates

³ According to *New Cassell's German Dictionary*, "schwammerei," the word closest in sound and in spelling to the word that Ken remembers, actually means "enthusiast."

one or more aspects of the research questions with accompanying analysis which speaks specifically to how and why these themes figured prominently in the academic success or activism of this study's participants. Thus, in Chapter 8, I examine the roles of the family, school, and community in the academic successes of the participants. In a similar manner, I focus upon the participants' college-going experiences in Chapter 9 and their activist experiences in Chapter 10. In Chapter 11, I present conclusions drawn from the study, as well as implications of the study, for promoting the success of first-generation college students. Finally, I offer recommendations for further research on the subject of college graduates who are the first in the histories of their families to earn a college degree.

CHAPTER VIII

FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY: VEHICLES TO REALIZED POTENTIAL

Freedom means precisely that--all your potential is open to you. When I watch the Olympics and I see persons who in their limited sphere are able to excel brilliantly, I realize that they exemplify potential for everybody. So even in the whole Christology, Jesus is not an exceptional man; He is the normative man. . . . And He has shown me what I can be if I get all my hangups over with. He is the man without hangups.

Hycel

What manner of man or woman from a low socioeconomic status background becomes the first in the history of his or her family to attend college, to earn a college degree, and to choose social or educational activism as an avocation? This question has compelled me throughout the course of conducting this study. My inquiry has required examination of study participants' self-concepts at various crucial points in their lives, with particular attention given to those forces which helped to shape their emerging identities. I have searched for clues in their early familial and environmental experiences in an effort to understand the foundations supporting their later academic, social, and economic successes. In a similar vein, I have examined participants' family and life experiences in order to illuminate those processes by which they attained their particular senses of self, their drive to succeed, and their knowledge of how to make success possible. In a very real way, my quest has been to understand, in rich, probing detail, a very complex question: Who are these people?

A review of demographic information about the seventeen men and women whose stories form the basis of this study reveals that they represent the five major racial/ethnic categories recognized by the United States Census Bureau; four different age categories from those as young as twenty-eight to those as old as seventy-four; and childhood homes from China to Canada to New York to the deep South to the Midwest to California. Twelve of the seventeen hold advanced degrees; all are professionals; and all come from families who were poor.

Their lives are both illuminating and exhilarating, the same and different, predictable and incredible. They support what we think we know about first-generation college graduates, even as they compel us to reconsider. They answer our questions and pose new ones, shedding light on old mysteries while simultaneously broadening the divide between what we do and do not understand. Yet, in all their obfuscation, I have found the life histories of these first-generation college graduates to be continually and profoundly interesting.

I began this study with a broad interest in identifying and understanding those family and life experiences that contribute to the matriculation and subsequent educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students. I expected that I might readily arrive at certain apparently valid answers that have been reported in the literature, such as familial support, involvement with faculty, and the formation of peer support groups (Rendon, Terenzini, & Upcraft, 1994); mentoring (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996); financial aid (Hewlett, 1981; Joyce, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Werner, 1995); academic preparedness (Chatman, 1994; Hewlett, 1981; Kiang, 1992; Lara, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992;); and high expectations from others (Lara, 1992; Rendon,

1992). But the literature tended not to touch upon why one child from a family of seven, for instance, might go to college when none of the other children with generally the same familial influences would go. Equally unclear was why, given the hardships of being the first one in a family to go to college when there is neither financial nor emotional support to do so, one would break with familial tradition and seek a college degree. The question becomes more poignant when one considers that “lack of emotional support” may sometimes be a euphemism for physical, emotional, and verbal abuse from one’s family. As I went about the business of collecting data, I endeavored to discover what exactly sets these individuals apart from almost everyone else.

The interviews I conducted are replete with many of the findings already reported in the literature. That said, the interviewees in this study offered rich insights and understandings that helped to build upon and expand generally accepted assumptions about first-generation college students. For instance, I was surprised to find that almost three-fourths of the participants in the study indicated coincidentally that they were singled out in some way or made to feel that they were special when they were quite young. Eight years is the greatest age reported by any of these participants at the onset of their “special status,” and only one participant reported being as old as eight at the onset. Clearly distinguishable from the family-external “teacher’s pet” syndrome, special status children appear to enjoy an enhanced position within the confines of the family, or in comparison to other family members. Because so many of the participants included some discussion of themselves as special status children in their life histories, I wondered whether such status plays a role in the likelihood that a child

will be able to achieve the remarkable, that is, to become the first in the family to go to college. This question is explored in the first section of this chapter.

In the second section of this chapter, I deal with another surprise finding: the significance on academic success of a phenomenon that I refer to as positive naming. Two-thirds of the people that I interviewed discussed individuals in their lives who gave them an affirming label or identifier based on a genuine assessment of the interviewee's personal qualities. According to the participants, the effects of positive naming on their lives were pivotal in helping them to improve their self-images, set high goals for themselves, believe in their capability to achieve those goals, and develop and pursue strategies toward their realization. Since the participants' accounts of the roles that others' high expectations played in their academic successes do not differ essentially from past findings, the brief discussion of expectations in this chapter serves primarily as a means of accentuating its distinctiveness from positive naming.

In addition to more discrete factors such as special status, positive naming, and others' expectations, consideration of the spectrum of variables that affected the matriculation and success at college of the first-generation students in this study reveals various findings related to home and school. For instance, only three of the participants had parents who had completed high school, and many had at least one parent who was functionally illiterate. A related finding showed that only the two youngest participants had believed all their lives that they could go to college.

While these data suggest a considerable amount about the low degree of assurance with which first-generation college students think about attending college, the interviewees

in this study repeatedly emphasized that the degree of respect for or interest in education, reading, or knowledge held by their parents played a far more important role in whether they actually earned a college degree. Sixteen of the interviewees indicated that at least one of their parents (or grandparents) had a strong interest in or respect for knowledge, education or reading, whether they were literate or not. Not surprisingly, a great majority of the participants revealed that they themselves have been avid readers since childhood. Expanding upon these data, in the third section of this chapter I examine the significance of parental attitudes toward education, reading, or knowledge on the academic success of their children.

The fourth section of this chapter addresses the influence of the home, the school, and the community on the academic success of the participants. A key point made repeatedly by the interviewees in this study is that student success depends, in an idealized world, on the student and on the institutions of home, school, and community. However, the reality of the participants' remembered experiences shows that a positive working together of all these components was rare, almost nonexistent, in their lives. In fact, the participants' stories depict systems of counter productivity with one or more units recurrently sabotaging the collective goal. Put differently, while the institutions of home, school, and community were committed in theory to working for the advantage of students, at any given point in the school experiences of these first-generation college graduates, one or more of those elements was working, often intentionally, against them.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter I discuss what I refer to as ascending cross-class identification, a factor of major importance to the success of first-generation college students both prior to and during college. As a strategy employed by the interviewees in

adjusting their self-concepts, ascending cross-class identification provides the information necessary to recognize aspects of a desired experience or identity and to determine as well as acquire the means to their attainment. To perhaps a greater degree than any of the prior sections, the discussion on ascending cross-class identification shows the participants in roles of agency on their own behalf.

In short, in this chapter I examine how the participants came to perceive themselves within the contexts of their families, their schools, and their larger communities. I identify and define a number of factors that are generally missing from the literature but figured prominently in the formation of the participants' self-concepts and served as important vehicles toward their earning college degrees. Additionally, I locate the sources of these vehicles in the participants' lives and discuss their short- and long-range effects on the participants' lives.

Special Status

I'm the "genius" in my extended family. When I went to VanGorder, I supposedly went to a "special" school and blah, blah, blah, and yak, yak, yak. On my mother's side, I'm the oldest kid and I was the boss; you couldn't mess with me. I was the first grandchild and male.

Michael

Throughout this study, interviewees repeatedly identified "special status" as a factor of considerable importance in their academic success. Many discussed forces in their early lives that made them believe they were special through means that were independent of their own deliberate actions. Like knighthood, special status was either bestowed upon or made known to them -- with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto -- by an adult, one

possessing the required rank or stature. While neither knighthood nor special status is owed, unlike knighthood, special status is not earned. It is akin to love, freely given with no apparent strings attached. The reasons for its bestowal may vary. The eldest child or the first male born into a family in some cultures may be awarded special status. A sickly child may be given special status by parents anxious about his mortality. A child with unusual natural gifts may receive special status from those who admire her talents. And others, like many of this study's participants, are simply chosen for reasons that they never knew or questioned.

Special status children accept the fact that they have been singled out, and they identify with being special. In Mary's case, this identification was, in part, the result of fortuitous circumstance, her birth order within her family. Consider, for example, the following quotation from Mary's discussion of her early family life: "They had fifteen children, eleven of whom are living. Two died before I was born, and my mother miscarried two. I'm the seventh birth, and I'm the fifth living. I have always heard that there is something special about the seventh child. I don't know what it is, but I happen to be that seventh child."

From Mary's earliest years, she was reminded that she was special because she was the seventh child born to her parents. Just as a baby's entering the world with the caul on its head is deemed a powerful sign in the lore of many cultures, being the seventh child born to a woman is considered auspicious among many African-Americans. What effect could such beliefs which are, in fact, superstitions have upon a person's life?

Caine and Caine (1997) point out that each of us employs deeply entrenched pictures, beliefs, and assumptions which help us to make sense of the world. They refer to these views as "mental models" or theories that we actually use in order to "organize experiences,

information, and strategies” and to “shape day-to-day decisions and interactions” (p. 21). If Caine and Caine are correct, and I believe that they are, then Mary’s knowledge of her special status as a result of her birth order could very likely have affected her expectations of herself and of the world around her. As a special status child, and having accepted the definition which marked her as different from the status quo, Mary may have been more attuned and receptive to the possibility of improvement in her life than were the other children in her family, none of whom were the seventh born. Since the conditions of Mary’s distinction were duly noted and passed on to her generation in the acculturation process, clearly the adults in her environment held somewhat similar mental models to her own. Recognizing that Mary was special, their interactions with -- as well as regarding -- her may have reflected, even unconsciously, their belief that more rather than the same was her due.

This view is supported by examples from the interviews of advantages resulting from the participants’ special status. For instance, in explaining why she was the child in her family who happened to visit the home of a little white girl who had lots of books and knew how to read, Mary describes an important benefit of the special status afforded her by an aunt. Implicit in the aunt’s treatment of Mary is her deeply ingrained belief that the seventh born is due special status:

I had something more than my siblings had, too, because I had an aunt who really loved me. I would go home with her periodically, and she would take me places. She worked for a white family, and sometimes she would take me to work with her. I remember one day she took me to work and I met the little white girl who lived there, and this girl could read. She had these books, and she was reading. I thought, “Oh, I would like to be able to read like that,” but I didn’t have any books. I used to tell my aunt how I would really like to have some books, and she would say, “Well, maybe one day you will get some.” I

couldn't understand how this little girl could have so many books and we didn't have any.

From Mary's example, as well as from the examples of others in the study, it appears that their special status as children opened doors for them that were not available to other children in the family. However limited the resources that Mary's aunt could provide, she was able to expose Mary to another world: the world of the white child where books were plentiful and reading, a skill at which even the grown ups in Mary's family were not adept, was easily done.

Bob, an artist and college art instructor, was another participant who indicated that he had been accorded special status as a child. He recalls the haven, both physical and emotional, made available to him as a young boy by his grandfather and his great aunts. By providing not only an escape hatch from an abusive family, but also an environment conducive to creative development, Bob's grandfather, especially, may have influenced his resilience and his emerging interest in art:

I come from a very dysfunctional family, but my grandfather was very nice and docile. Every morning I would run downstairs to see him. He lived in our basement, and in his place was all this wood that he would collect from garbage that people would throw out. I can remember at two and three years old being down there with a hammer, making stuff out of that wood. I think my grandfather was really smart because he would read all the time and as I got a little older, he would talk about commodities and their futures. He would always say, "Watch what's going to happen here!" He was very nice to me and let me freely involve myself in creative play.

I also had some very old great aunts who took me under their wing. I was the only male child at that time, and my two sisters were older. My great aunts and my grandfather thought I was the neatest thing. Then they all died, almost all at once, between the time that I was five and seven years old. That was really traumatic for me. It was terrible.

But I think I had already gotten the idea that people could be accepting of you no matter how you were or who you were. I think I knew that was possible from my old great aunts and my grandfather. They liked me no matter what. That meant a lot to me.

We moved from Chicago when I was seven, and in order to get away from what was going on in the family, both my sisters and I would go off by ourselves. I don't even remember my sisters until they were much older because they would retreat. I would either run away and read or I would run away and paint. I played by myself the whole time I was growing up and I feel that when I paint, I do exactly the same thing. I paint by myself, and I like people a lot, but I also like the time when I am completely by myself. Both my sisters got pregnant and got married to get out of there. I would run away and draw or paint, just as I had done when I was little and I could escape to my grandfather.

As the first male grandchild in his family, Bob enjoyed a special status that was not available to his two sisters. With a grandfather and two great aunts who doted on him, he experienced unconditional approval which may have mitigated, to some degree, the horrendous effects of parental abuse. His artistic experiments as a young child with his grandfather's recycled wood are currently reflected in the art projects that he creates and the curricula that he designs using environmentally friendly and recycled materials. Bob's grandfather allowed him free reign in his artistic play, but sometimes he demonstrated his connection to and awareness of Bob by engaging him in conversations which communicated respect for Bob's ability to think. By the time Bob was seven years old and his great aunts and grandfather were dead, it appears that their loving intervention in his life had already affected his sense of self. He had been told, and he had believed, that he was loved and a special person. In addition, he had learned in his grandfather's basement apartment to value the solitude of artistic endeavor, a way of life that helped to sustain him throughout college and

his adult life. His sisters, being girls, had found no comparable sanctuary, and running away to read presaged their running away, as pregnant teens, to get married.

Though Bob and his sisters were subjected to the same physically and emotionally abusive home environment, the enhanced quality of life that Bob experienced during his early formative years may have given him an educational advantage over his sisters. In addition to developing a love for what would become his chosen field as well as his way of life, he knew for a fact that he “mattered” to someone. Almost everyone interviewed for this study related personal stories similar to Mary’s and Bob’s. Each emphasized that they had been more inclined to learn because somebody cared about them, that special status as a young child helped to sustain them during later periods, and that because they knew they were highly valued by someone, they had the confidence to overcome barriers to their goals. Indeed, these participants seem to have accepted, as young children, that they were indeed special, and that knowledge seems to have helped them to thrive.

Positive Naming

I would look at my children and, based on their strong assets, I would name professions for them. In that way, I could highlight their gifts and give them something to work toward.

Mary

Closely aligned with being singled out as special is a practice that I call “positive naming” which two-thirds of the participants discussed coincidentally as significant forces in their lives. Interviewees who indicated that they were influenced by positive naming described a situation where someone who cared about them or knew them well helped them to discover their potential. Positive naming is different from stating one’s expectations of someone else

since implicit in an expectation is the charge or responsibility to carry out an action. An expectation is bound in the presumption of duty. Positive naming, on the other hand, seems prophetic in nature and carries no assumption by any parties involved that the one who has been positively named is being told what he must do. Rather, positive naming is an affirming statement of condition generally based upon honest observation and assessment of the subject. It provides direction which is devoid not only of obligation that the direction be followed, but also of guilt if it is not.

Many of the study's participants attested to the significance of positive naming in their lives. For instance, Carmen, a graduate of DePaul University, told me:

I knew all the time that I was going to college and to DePaul. I always wanted to be an attorney even when I was a little kid because my dad always told me, "You constantly argue things. That's all you know how to do. You might as well make money at it by being an attorney." I used to argue the other point even if I didn't believe in it just for the sake of the argument. So I wanted to be an attorney.

As this example demonstrates, parents and others can direct children toward academic success simply by assessing their obvious strengths, aligning those strengths with a profession, and sharing their conclusions with the respective individuals. Carmen's father clearly believed that his daughter possessed the critical thinking skills and the powers of persuasion necessary to becoming an attorney. By recognizing Carmen's argumentativeness as a positive quality, he propelled her toward academic excellence while affirming her worthiness and her right to be exactly as she was.

Hycel, a Baptist minister and college professor who overcame enormous educational setbacks before achieving academic success, also recalled several instances of being positively named, though not always in a specific way:

When I was a little boy, everybody thought I was going to be a preacher, and . . . I used to stand on a crate and preach to everybody about drinking Dad's Old Fashioned Root Beer.

. . . My mother finally left the Penecostal church to join my father at the Baptist church. This was a much more education conscious environment. . . . and they said, "Hycel's going to be somebody one of these days!"

. . . Mr. and Mrs. Browder were letting me stay at their house, and they were feeding me often. They had a positive sense that there was something special in me. They never questioned that sense. In fact, they thought I was brilliant. I was fighting as hard as I could to make their dreams for me come true.

In their pronouncement that Hycel was going to be a preacher, adults in his environment used positive naming to provide the young boy with a lofty professional objective. Certainly, a preacher -- especially an educated one -- in the black community sixty years ago was at or near the apex of the society. The prediction in Hycel's community that he would be a preacher coincided with the prediction among the educated folk of his father's church that he was going to be "somebody." Because Hycel wanted so desperately to become somebody by becoming educated but had such difficulty achieving success at school, positive naming, along with the special status provided him by his landlords, the Browders, may have been the constant in his life which deterred him from academic capitulation. His discussion of the Browders illuminates the power that they gave him to persist in trying to succeed. Since they never doubted his ability or his impending scholastic triumphs, he was compelled and enabled to continue striving as a college student. As long as they believed in him and

supported him, he believed that his own strength and determination would not fail. Hycel recalled that not only did the Browders articulate that he was going to be somebody, their contributions towards that goal also took another form:

They were both really good to me, and Mrs. Browder was downright inspiring. She would tell me sometimes, "You're going to be something one of these days." I owe her today for rent that I couldn't pay. She could have put me out many times. Many times Mrs. Browder knew that I was upstairs in my room with nothing to eat. She'd go out and catch some fresh catfish. And she'd say, "Taylor, come on down here!" And I'd say, "Mrs. Browder, I'm not hungry, thank you." And she'd say, "You know you're hungry, boy! You'd better come on down here and eat these catfish!"

While various factors emerged from the interviewees' stories as significant contributors to academic success for first-generation students, nowhere in the cases was the power of a professor to change the life of a student more simply and dramatically demonstrated than through positive naming. It turned the force of negativity on its head and created a new reality for the student. Many students mentioned the key role that professors played in identifying, communicating, and affirming their nascent strengths and abilities. For example, Theresa recounted the dramatic impact one of her college professors had on her life in this way:

One of my teachers at Southern whom I got along really, really well with took a real liking to me. She told me, "You would be a great teacher." I had told her about my being an RA (resident assistant) and working my way through school and taking out loans, etc., and she told me that she wanted me to take her Foreign Language Methods of Teaching class. She explained that if I had that class, I could apply to be a TA (teaching assistant). I took the class. I applied for a TA and got it. With my teaching assistantship, I would be paid money every month in addition to having all my tuition paid. I went on to graduate school because of my teacher who told me that I would be a great teacher. . . . It wasn't until then, when I was teaching, that I felt confident in my Spanish, that I felt that I knew what I was doing. For the first time, I thought, "I am smart." I was in graduate school and I saw a lot of people who

weren't in my position. Before, I would have thought they were better than I. But now I told myself, "I'm the one who is here in this position. They didn't get this position; I did!" I began becoming confident in myself. I began taking on the responsibility of the honor society that my teacher had started. I became the president of the National Honor Society for the Spanish classes. And for the very first time in my life, and this was in my first semester of graduate school, I got a 4.0 grade point average.

Along with special status and positive naming, participants indicated that the expectations of others -- a characteristic discussed in the literature on first-generation students -- also influenced them powerfully when they were young. The following two examples illustrate the difference between expectations and positive naming. The first is provided by Lula:

When Mother lived with us on the island for a few years, the rich white family that she worked for had a daughter who was a nurse. I was around five at the time, and I remember that Mother started telling me that she wanted me to become a trained nurse like Miss Margaret. So I grew up with that. And Miss Margaret would tell me, "You have to finish school, Lula, and you have to go to nursing school." I was all for it, and I was always a B+ student. I was valedictorian all the way up, even in college.

Lula's example illustrates a role that parents sometimes play in setting high expectations for their children. Lula's mother selected a role model for her five-year-old daughter. With the aid of the role model, she encouraged Lula to accept her mother's aspiration as her own. In a case of positive naming, Lula's demonstrated characteristics would have been the major factor in her mother's selection of a profession to recommend to her daughter.

Yet, the "less personalized" high expectations that Lula's mother held for her daughter were effective even beyond their influence on Lula's persistence and success in school.

Though she became a teacher and a business person rather than a nurse, Lula remained interested in the health care field and spent a number of years in the employ of a physician.

Carmen likewise described how her father's expectations influenced her:

My dad had very high expectations. I can remember when I was in first grade and I brought home a "C." He was extremely disappointed. He was like, "What is this? You could have done better! This is a "C"! I don't want to see one of these ever again!" I got the "C" in PE (physical education). It didn't matter to him that it was only gym. I still remember that. My dad was so mad! I decided I would never bring home a "C" again.

This example of high expectations differs from positive naming in that it does not name and it conveys an explicit responsibility to carry out an action. An effective motivator for Carmen, it demonstrates the intention to deter development of poor attitudes toward any aspect of the school curriculum. From the perspective of Carmen's father, if a course was part of the curriculum, then it was worth doing well. Carmen integrated her father's high expectations of herself and went on to earn many scholastic honors.

However subtle their differences, special status, positive naming, and others' expectations emerged as important factors that enhanced the educational opportunities of many of the participants in this study. Also central to laying the foundations for their academic successes were the attitudes toward learning portrayed by significant adults in the interviewees' early lives. It is to this topic that I now turn.

Parental Attitudes Toward Knowledge

In my family, there was a desire for learning. My mother had never been to school. My father finished fifth grade. My family did not have the understanding that they were going to do whatever they could to make sure their children got to college. My parents' idea was, "Do whatever you can. If you can't do it, we can't do anything. If you fail the entrance exam, come back home and farm."

Gaoke

In *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get to College*, Levine and Nidiffer (1996) found that a heterogeneous group of college students reported an almost unvarying story of how they decided to attend college: a mentor influenced them to do so. While the same was true for many of this study's participants, they identified an additional component of their educational conditioning that I refer to as "pre-mentoring." They defined prementors in essence as individuals from their early lives who originally oriented them towards valuing reading, knowledge, or education. With only one exception, the study's participants reported that they were influenced early, impressionistically, and deeply by the parents or grandparents whom they most admired and who held knowledge, education, reading, or combinations of the three in great esteem. This is a salient point since it speaks to the power of adults, whether or not they are literate, to influence the development of their children's and grandchildren's appreciation of learning and, consequently, their chances for earning a college degree. The following discussion shows how the interviewees' parents and grandparents, regardless of the facility with which they could read and write, predisposed the participants toward valuing knowledge, education, or reading by valuing them themselves.

Certainly the parents and grandparents of this study's participants proved to be excellent pre-mentors despite the fact that most had attained educational levels of fewer than

eight years. In fact, both parents of only three of the interviewees had earned a high school diploma, and only six of the interviewees had at least one parent who had attended high school at all. Ten participants had at least one parent with an educational level below eighth grade, and five had fathers with only a third grade education. Not surprisingly, only three of the participants had aspired all their lives to go to college, while two of the three had never doubted that they would be able to go. They are two of the youngest in the study, and, in each case, both of their parents had earned high school diplomas.

As children, most of the first-generation graduates in this study had not contemplated even the possibility of attending college with any degree of confidence, if they had contemplated it at all. Since their parents generally had low levels of education, their stories reveal a strong connection between a parent's educational accomplishments and a child's confidence that he will attend college. It is a false assumption, however, that parents with little or no formal education are not the initial, primary forces to impart to their children an abiding respect for knowledge. The interviews that I conducted show overwhelmingly that parents and grandparents of the participants, often in spite of their own illiteracy, were the children's first role models for valuing education, reading, or knowledge. In fact, the interviewees repeatedly emphasized that the degree of respect for or interest in knowledge, education, or reading held by their parents played a vastly important role in whether they would earn a college degree.

One example is provided by Ray who explained that although his father was not able to help him with his homework at all, he "had an incredible reverence for education":

My father was a merchant seaman, so he was away on ship for three weeks out of the month and at home the fourth week. Every morning when I was growing up, if my dad was home, he would go down to the store and buy fresh bread, milk, and a newspaper. He always bought *The Daily News*, which had pictures, rather than *The New York Times*, which generally did not. Then he would come upstairs and look through the newspaper. On Sundays, he would make an omelette and Spanish coffee for our brunch before he returned to ship. I did not know that my dad could not read until I was older, and I thought it was wonderful that he had modeled reading by buying the paper and looking at it. As I got older, he would sometimes ask me questions about the pictures and what they meant. My father's newspaper is just something that just sticks in my mind. He retired the year I went off to college, and he continued every morning to buy bread, milk, and the paper. He was very curious about what was happening in the world, and I was glad when he gained access to cable television and the Spanish television programs.

In explaining the reason for his father's illiteracy, Ray went on to say:

His own father had been a terrible person who abandoned my grandmother and their young son in San Juan. My grandmother was destitute, so she went home to her brothers on the family farm. She was received as a servant, and my father was not allowed to go to school after he reached third grade. He never talked much about his early childhood, but he did tell me that his uncles worked him almost like an animal. When he was twelve years old, he ran away to his birth place, San Juan, lied about his age, and got a job as a stevedore on the docks. Years later, his mother came to the city, and he supported her and two of his cousins. Much later, when his mother and her second husband were very old and alone in Puerto Rico, my father faithfully sent them money to supplement their upkeep.

My father wanted us to go through high school so that we could do better than he had, but no one in my family ever talked about college. I know that I got the idea that I wanted to earn a college degree from several interventions in my life.

While Ray's father was not a mentor -- in the sense of the term used by Levine and Nidiffer -- who encouraged him to go to college, his father played an instrumental role in preparing Ray to seize educational opportunity by valuing reading, a window to knowing. The many contributions of Ray's "actual" mentors, the cultural opportunities made available to

him through the New York City Public Schools, and the college counseling provided by his parish were powerful and direct forces in his decision to go to college. But Ray's inclination to be open to educational mentoring flowed directly from the value which he placed upon education prior to his mentor's influence, a value learned from his unlettered dad.

Another study participant, Diane, told a similar story when she described how her earliest educational inspiration came from her mother:

I remember when I was a little girl my mother always encouraged me and would give me pens and pencils and I would draw something. She would say, "Oh, look at you writing! You're going to be a writer some day." She'd say things like that, and that really helped me focus on reading and writing when I was in school, because even when I was just drawing lines, she thought I had potential.

My mom and dad are my grandparents who raised me as their own daughter. They'd been brought up on a farm and had no education beyond sixth grade for my mom and third grade for my dad, so they could read and write some, but they knew how to do other things. Most of my inspiration for going to school and focusing on intellectual pursuits came from my mom. She enjoyed reading, and when I got old enough, I would get her big print books and we could share reading.

She appreciated me bringing homework home. Even though she may not have understood, she was always there supporting me and very proud of all the awards I got. She told me I could do more and I really believed that I could because she believed in me so strongly. I really had no idea that I couldn't do more until I got into the real world . . .

A clear case of positive naming, Diane's example also shows her mother as a pre-mentor whose parenting strategies included the use of encouraging words accompanied by modeling. As was true of Ray's father's actions, Diane's mother's reading spoke volumes to the child. Both pre-mentors communicated their value of reading by engaging in it as a

valuable exercise. By so doing, they prepared the way for the education related mentors who would later enter their children's lives.

Closely aligned to the pre-mentoring roles played by the interviewees' parents was the tendency of the participants not only to synthesize as children the education related values demonstrated by their parents but also to emulate those aspects of their parents' behaviors as adults. The following excerpts suggest how strongly the participants identified with the pre-mentoring components of their parents' characteristics and how they mirrored those qualities in their aspirations, their actions, and even their professions.

Hycel's early inspiration came from his father:

My father was from a family that had been in the north for two generations. He was a fairly educated fellow who had gone to high school. He had not attended college, but he had had great aspirations of doing so. I remember him when I was growing up as a reader. I remember him going to his bedroom to read all the time. He had this northern speech, which was really different from my mother's southern accent and vocabulary. At that time, there still existed a schism between northerners and southerners, even among African-Americans. Northern blacks sort of looked down on those southern blacks who felt inferior. . .

My father had dreams of becoming a history teacher, and he had an academic air about him. . . . When I had to go back home and bury my father, that act seemed to catapult me into a manhood that I had not experienced before. I had admired my father so much . . . and I had believed that there just was no question that he could not answer -- he was just that smart. Then he died, and I really felt that his spirit became my spirit, and I gained this great ambition to accomplish all that he could accomplish. To a certain extent, I feel that I am whatever I am as a fulfillment of my father's aspirations.

Ken is a humanities and philosophy instructor who loves music and literature, as did his father:

My father was a very intelligent man without the education. My sister said he actually bought the set of Great Books that was in our house because he was going to read them. My mother couldn't stand him reading books all the time,

and the books, in their nice black covers, just sat on the shelves and got dusty until I discovered them.

My father was musical, and he played the accordion when he had too much to drink, which was very common. He played the accordion, harmonica, and the piano simultaneously. He was a very musical man. It was very sad when I went back to see him in Sweden just before he died, and I tried to get him to play the piano and the accordion and he couldn't do it anymore. He couldn't remember how to do it.

Theresa, a foreign language instructor who loves to travel, was inspired by her father:

When I was little, I remember my dad went back to school and was taking GED (General Equivalency Diploma) classes. He was studying about a lot of things. And when we had questions about directions or history or anything, we would ask my dad. He had been throughout the fifty states. He would bring up the map and show us all this stuff about people, places, and how to get to different locations.

At sixteen, I bought my own car, went to Florida with my best friend, and did things that no one in my family had ever done. No one but my dad had traveled, and now me. But he hadn't been to Disney World or seen the Epcot Center. I worked hard and saved up my money and went on a trip to Europe with my high school. I liked Spanish because we got to talk about other people's cultures. That was a first for me in terms of classes -- learning about other people of the world.

Florence talked about her mother and grandmother as primal forces:

... [M]y grandmother ... was a very, very strong influence in my life. When you look at me today and you see me and what I am about, in large part you are seeing my grandmother. ... When I consider the role model to go beyond what I was at the time, I can look to my mother. ... When she was a small child, she was sickly with asthma. She had it all her life, so as a child she missed a great deal of school. She left grade school. I think she didn't attain higher than sixth grade. But what my mother accomplished was to me proof of what a woman can do. ... I sort of choke up sometimes when I think of my mom. ... she just achieved so much in her life that you wouldn't expect anyone to achieve if they dropped out of grade school. For example, she became the membership chairman for the Indiana State Board of the PTA. And when she took on that role, she was able to generate more members than anyone in that position had ever generated before. She would go out and speak at schools and to various community and civic groups. ... the subject

matter of her talks was called Indian lore. She also hosted, as Princess Break of Daun, a television program here in Chicago on Channel Eleven called Totem Club.

My mother's name was Marti Shock. I admired her tremendously, and I said to myself that one of these days I would like to have a show on Channel Eleven. I was able to accomplish that.

The preceding examples provide vivid illustrations of the significant effects that parental attitudes toward knowledge or learning had upon the lives of the interviewees. In addition to indicating that they became more disposed to appreciate education as a result of pre-mentoring, many of the interviewees also stated that they read voraciously during childhood, a habit that was in keeping with parental values and that has been reported in the literature on first-generation college students as typical behavior. As young children, the value systems by which the participants would learn to play out their day-to-day interactions in the world were being formed. These deep impressions were woven in large part from examples set by the adults in their lives whom they most admired and would be readily and repeatedly retrieved as indelible clues to how the participants would infuse their lives with meaning. As the participants branched out from their families, other variables stemming from institutions outside the home advanced to command their attention. Concern about their identities within the contexts of their schools and communities was one of these variables.

Home, School, Community

"Get yourself a trade," was the strong message I got at home. At school there was no message at all. I just went through the grades.

Jim

Contrary to what one might expect, parental interest in or respect for education or knowledge did not necessarily translate to parental support for college. The parents of fewer than half of the participants could be said to support their child's aspiration, either emotionally or financially, to seek a college degree. Also interesting were the shades or degrees of support among parents, schools, and community not only for the participants to attend college, but also for them to get the quality of education necessary for success in college.

A panorama of other issues and problems faced participants in this study as they endeavored to navigate the socio-political mine fields of home, school, and community. Among others, these included non-supportive teachers, counselors, and administrators; parents who were unable to help with homework or with other concerns connected to the school; class based antiintellectualism among family members; and racial and ethnic prejudice at school and in the community. How did these students manage, despite barriers of such great magnitude? Embedded in their stories are illustrative accounts of how they achieved success.

Supposedly working on behalf of the students were the students themselves along with their homes, their schools, and their communities, a widely accepted formula for a successful educational experience. Yet, this study's interviewees repeatedly described situations where the components of home, school, and community rarely, if ever, worked in any positive or simultaneous fashion for the benefit of the students. Instead, home, school, and community

functioned most often in ways that were counter productive and that undermined the efforts put forth by the students. The study's case histories revealed that at any given point in the participants' educational experiences, one or more of those units was diametrically, and often intentionally, opposed to the good of the students.

Consider, for example, the case of Nancy, who was the first in her family to complete high school. As a child, she had a very positive, supportive relationship with her teachers. She admired them, and still does, for their dedication to their roles in the lives of children. Nancy recalled:

These teachers thought I was smart, so while they didn't say, "You should go to college," school was a place where I could be successful. They would single me out for things. If there was a play, I would get the lead because they knew I would learn the lines. I got to hand out books. There was a contest of some kind when I was in seventh grade, and the prize was a book and going to hear a lecture by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the guy who wrote the Tarzan books. I didn't even know who he was, I didn't even know about writers' lectures. He was from Oak Park and he came back to lecture and I went with my teacher to hear him. For me it was a peep into another world. What a wonderful woman my teacher was to do this. These women at my school -- my school was a very old fashioned working class school. . . . I think they devoted a lot of energy and caring. I don't know if they were affectionate particularly, but they really latched onto a kid who loved books.

This aspect of Nancy's life history shows education working admirably and effectively, with caring, supportive teachers who provided her with experiences that were no less than transformational. Her doctorate in the area of the humanities, her role as a writer and college professor, her compassion for others and love of beauty and culture all have roots, undoubtedly, in her elementary school experiences.

Almost entirely negative, however, was the role of the community in Nancy's life. Racist and anti-education, especially for women, her community let her know that she "didn't

belong.” Because her mother is Jewish, many of the eastern European kids in her immigrant neighborhood set out to terrorize Nancy:

[N]ot all of them would call me names, and I would find my coat with bad things written on the back. . . . There were no other Jews in this town so that I could find other people. What I needed to find was people who weren’t anti-Semitic. And I had different ideas than they did on race relations, on all kinds of things. So I was considered to be peculiar, different, but not in a good way. And I never seemed to be able to talk that kind of small talk that you’re supposed to be able to do.

Nancy was a smart kid, a voracious reader, as were many other of the study’s participants, which was very helpful to her in elementary school but not at all helpful in her working class community where “they didn’t like smart girls.” Interestingly enough, being smart was also not an adequate calling card to ease her navigation through high school. She found that her high school teachers were less supportive than their elementary school counterparts had been basically because a large number of the students in the high school were from the middle class, and the students who were valued were the middle class students. Nancy was not one of them. She remembers not going to school sometimes because she didn’t have anything “appropriate” to wear. Even though she was very active in high school, got to be class president, and does not believe that anybody thought that she was “particularly dumb,” she remembers a high school math teacher telling her, “You’ll never go to college. Don’t even try.”

At the time that Nancy was receiving no encouragement from her high school to go to college, she was receiving even less at home. Throughout high school, she had followed two tracks, the academic and the vocational, because her father did not believe that girls should go to college and insisted that she learn a business trade. Because she knew that she

would go to college if it were at all possible, Nancy spent her high school years doing twice the work of most students, as did some other of the study's participants. Holding down a job and taking two tracks in high school left little time for extra curricular activities, such as playing in the school orchestra, which she would have loved to pursue.

With home, school, and the immediate community in opposition to Nancy's educational goals, her chances to get into and succeed in college were pathetically out of balance. They were supported only by Nancy, herself, who had the benefit of avid reading; a wonderful elementary school education; her mother as pre-mentor who had attended high school for two years, loves to read, and "writes in a very nice hand"; special status as a young child; and positive naming, the latter two from her grandmother with whom she shared a room until she went off to college.

With the equation of STUDENT + HOME + SCHOOL + COMMUNITY = ACADEMIC SUCCESS applied to the other participants in the study, one sees stories similar to Nancy's where different parts of the equation subtracted from the rest and students "got by" with whatever assets they had or could muster. For instance, Ken spoke about his high school experience in almost the same positive way that Nancy described her time in elementary school:

I took sophomore English with a man named Mr. Snow whom I remember in great detail. I can remember whole pieces of that class. First of all, he gave us an outline of English grammar, which I still remember. And we used to diagram sentences and break things down. Then we read *Macbeth*, *Idylls of the King*, oh, whole passages, and all of a sudden I discovered literature! It was just incredible.

Mr. Snow and his wife used to sing around the town, mostly show tunes. . . . We went to his house and he had a grand piano and he was a pretty

cultivated man. He and just any number of high school teachers just opened the world up for me. That was a transformation. I had good grade school teachers, but everything was sort of proletarian, sort of ordinary. My high school teachers sort of made my life come alive. And everything else followed from that.

Mr. Snow opened new worlds for me by example, by being worldly, by being well versed. He held up Wiley's book about advertising. He said he'd read it last night. I looked at my girlfriend. "He read the whole damn book last night?! Gosh!"

And the lack of familial support for college that Ken received was almost a replay of Nancy's. Ken explained: "At home, regarding college, don't even mention it! They had no idea about it whatsoever. It was expected that I would get a high school diploma and go to work."

Carmen, on the other hand, received outstanding familial support, and when a boy in her sixth grade class called her a "spic," she felt that her school responded appropriately. But the community from which the boy came, and to which Carmen and her family were relative newcomers, was not supportive:

It was a Caucasian -- Irish, German, Polish -- neighborhood. It wasn't really comfortable when we moved into that neighborhood because after that boy called me that name, I had to ride my bike in our back yard or I had to ride in the alley. My parents didn't want me riding out front because they were afraid that people were going to say things. We suffered from stereotypes because they would hear, "Oh, they're Hispanic," and they immediately thought negative things. Until they saw the type of people and type of family we were. That we weren't there to cause any type of harm to anybody. Then it got easier. We were sort of accepted, but it was different in the beginning. . . .

My dad said, "I thought that moving would be better, and now I have to keep them enclosed in their back yard." I couldn't walk to the corner by myself. I was never sent to the store by myself. If I was going to a friend's house, my dad would drop me off and pick me up. I couldn't stay over at my friends'. Girls who are twelve and thirteen always have slumber parties. Well, my dad would let me stay until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then he would

come and pick me up. He didn't feel comfortable. He was afraid for my emotional safety. In the old neighborhood, he had worried about my physical safety.

While community was the weak link in Carmen's experience, it was among the strongest in Ray's world. It was in the community that he found help with his school work, help that his family could not give him. He stated:

I noticed that George and Buffy would help their children with their homework, so one day I mentioned to Buffy that I was having trouble with math. Buffy said that she wasn't that great at math but we could work together to figure it out. She invited me to come over regularly and at a certain time. The Calvert children would be doing their homework, and either George or Buffy would help me with my studies, too. They were raising their kids to go to college, and they started asking me questions about whether I wanted to go to college. They knew my academic weaknesses, and yet they seemed to see no reason why I should not go to college. They acted as if wanting to go to college were as natural for me as it was for their own children. They had a quality of life that I liked and intended to have. It seemed clear to me that going to college was the best way to achieve my goal.

Ray's words illustrate his willingness as a child to take a risk by approaching, completely on his own, an educated new couple to seek help with his homework. This represents a proactive stance exhibited by the participants in almost all the life stories. For instance, Larry described how he overcame a debilitating stutter and improved his chances of getting a good education in part by assessing, completely on his own, the comparative quality and degree of his knowledge about school subjects:

I must have been seven or eight years old and probably had the condition beforehand, but I remember, as I sit here, being in third or fourth grade and having a speech problem that made it difficult for me to ask a question. I would hesitate, pause, and stammer, "Do-do-do-do-do." I didn't realize until later, looking back, what caused it. At the time, it was a problem for me. People would ask me questions, and I wouldn't respond for fear that I would stutter and stammer and couldn't respond. People would say, "Why doesn't he answer? Does he not hear me? Can't he understand?" Then when I did

answer, with the combination of events, they probably said, “Well, this guy doesn’t have it all.” I was sent to Special Ed. I stayed there for two or three days, and they sent me back to regular class. I was bounced back and forth between Special Ed and regular classes for three or four times. Finally, I guess the regular class teacher couldn’t assign me to Special Ed permanently and just accepted the fact that I was slow. I didn’t question their decision. I figured they knew what they were doing. They were adults and in control.

I suspect the stuttering and stammering problem slowly went away. . . I surely couldn’t have had it in junior high, seventh and eighth grades, not a whole lot. Then around eighth or ninth grade, I started to realize that I could deal with whatever people presented to me. And once I realized that I could answer correctly and present reasonably well, the stammering slowly went away.

By the time I was a senior, I had started to analyze why I had stammered. I realized that I had feared being counted a fool. So rather than speak out and remove all doubts, I would just remain silent. People perceived the silences as slowness. Then, although I hadn’t relinquished my fear of communicating with people -- I still didn’t talk a whole lot -- at least I was able to get rid of the stuttering and stammering. I went from high school to engineering school.

Showing an uncommon independence of thought, in time Larry began to consider the mounting evidence that he was as intelligent as anyone else and came to reject the prevalent expert assessment of his capability. The negative names such as “Special Ed student,” “slow,” and “one who ‘doesn’t have it all’ ” imposed on many students connected with Special Education programs slowly lost their power over Larry under the scrutiny of his reasoning skills and his mounting academic prowess. In his analysis of the situation and his conclusion that the authorities at his school were wrong about his intelligence, Larry was likely enabled by the stance that had been taken by the Special Education staff -- who were also authorities -- when they validated his intellectual normalcy by rejecting him as a Special Education student. In addition, they actually had won in the battle with his classroom teacher on how

he was to be labeled and served, which meant that his teacher was wrong and they were right. This was an affirming action even though Larry would be treated as slow for years. Such “subversive” affirmations by some educators were not uncommon in the participants’ stories. When viewed against the backdrop of the powerful educational systems and incongruous wrongs that were being subverted, these counter actions appear inconsequential. However, they mitigated to some degree the negative effects that schools had on some of this study’s participants. In turn, the students’ enhanced self-concepts augmented their ability to recover from those and other educational barriers that would be put in their way.

Ray illustrated this point by telling me about a speech therapist who assured him that his lack of fluency in English did not mean that there was something wrong with him. This was an important revelation since it opposed several negative reinforcements that Ray was receiving from school at the time. With his identity under attack by authority figures at school who criticized his ethnic group, affirmation by the speech therapist was a signal that those teachers who spoke negatively about non-English speaking people could be incorrect in what they were saying:

I started kindergarten around this time and sometimes heard teachers make negative comments about me or other Puerto Rican people because we did not speak English well. I recall hearing people at school say that we were now in America and should forget our Spanish and learn English. These interchanges did not make me feel good because I believed that it was okay to be Puerto Rican and to speak Spanish. There were no special programs for those of us who did not speak English, and we sank or swam on our own. I did not catch on easily at school, and with the exception of kindergarten, my early years in the classroom were difficult. Groups of us were sent to speech therapy three times a week because we were not fluent in English. But the speech therapist was very nice and recognized full well that we did not have speech problems beyond an inadequate knowledge of the English language.

Interventions in students' lives, such as those related by Larry and Ray, generally made persistence in school a little bit easier simply by strengthening, however incrementally, students' perceptions of who they were as individuals and of their suitability for being taught. Still, as Ray's and Larry's examples also show, gaining access to a class where a student would be given excellent instruction was not always easy or possible for this study's interviewees. Ken discovered during elementary school that if he was not learning from his teachers, he could learn from other students who just seemed to know more than he did basically because of their middle class status:

One reason my mother always hated school teachers is that I was doing very badly in math and my teacher, who was a very domineering woman, made my mother come in and, just because she was an immigrant, sit on the dunce stool which my mother was obviously very familiar with. The teacher directed my mother, "Sit down here!" I really hadn't started to emerge at school. But we lived in a Jewish neighborhood in New York and all those kids seemed to know so much more, to be so much sharper because they had a middle class environment. So I learned a lot from them. For instance, one kid asked me, "Well, are you going to go out to the country?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Which county do you live in, Nassau or Suffolk?" I said, "What? County?" I had never heard the word before. I had no idea what he was talking about. I learned "county" from him. Then one time we were supposed to paint pictures of Arabs, and I had to ask him, "What's an Arab? I never heard of that." These kids were painting camels and people in the headdresses. I started looking at that, and I said, "Gee. . ." They had me paint sand because I had no idea what was going on.

Ken found that learning from advanced students was hardly possible, however, if he was not in class with them. He told me about the difficulty he experienced when he had to spend a year in a lower track. His example clearly illustrates a strategy shared by many of the study's participants: When school did not advance their learning, they simply took it upon themselves to do other things to learn as well as they could:

In my junior year, for one reason or another, I was not put in an advanced English class. I can remember only one story from that year, and I remember it well. It was something about a marriage in Louisiana where people made all this noise outside the married couple's cottage. Shivarree is what the custom is called. That's all I can remember from the whole year. I mean, I learned nothing from class, and everybody there was sort of out of focus. But being put in advanced classes with my background, not having had the advantages of some of these kids, was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn. The honors kids were some of the brightest in the school. My experience is one example of a tremendous argument for getting people with a lot of ability in classes with other people and getting them exposed. Democracy does not require leveling where we waste human potential. And economics could stand a little bit of leveling out. . . . My junior year, I had to do my learning on my own. I just read everything I could from the public library.

In Jack's case, the inadequacy of high school resulted in independent and specialized learning which influenced his desire to go to college to study aeronautical engineering. He recalled:

Adamson High School was grossly easy. I was out of school at 12:15 p.m. I had school for just four hours a day. I was not athletic, and I was very shy, a little egghead, trying to hide it. I started going to local libraries and plundering the shelves. I got very interested in model airplanes and began building gas model free flights which were very unusual. I began designing them. When I was seventeen, I drew up plans for one that won a lot of meets. People are still building that model airplane today. I had been building little rubber band types before I saw a gas model flying and went crazy over it. I bought a kit, but I soon quit making the kit models and designed my own. I think that's what set me up to become an engineer. I started selling the plans after a while and earned a tiny bit of money. People saw me flying my plane and wanted it. Some parts are hard to make, so I started making kits to sell. I still have the plans. They are on tracing paper, in India ink. They are almost sixty years old.

In every case history, the interviewees discussed their tendencies to do their best to achieve their goals. By trying to make the best of a bad school situation, Jack not only learned independently, he also developed a lifelong interest in aviation and began deliberations about

college and a major course of study. The participants in this study were goals-oriented people who vigorously sought whatever they wanted. They were single minded in their pursuit of a college education, and setting and keeping clear goals appears to have been a commonly beneficial behavior. By utilizing strengths as school children derived from both current and previous experiences at the time, they successfully combatted inadequate degrees of support from home, school, or community. To a person, they possessed intentionality similar to that expressed by Bob in the following excerpt:

When I was in school . . . I wasn't very athletic and my father just couldn't stand it. My brother was perfect in all these sports and I was just . . . I'm so cross focused, I can't play anything with a ball, and I had no interest. And I thought I was supposed to be good in athletics. I used to get beat up by my father constantly, constantly, constantly. And then I'd get a good grade on a test, and I'd get beat up at school because I'd ruined the curve. There were some times when I wouldn't get everything done as well and as fast as I should, and even though teachers liked me pretty well, they'd say, "Come on, Bob! Get your work done!" I was so slow at reading and it was always a struggle for me. I would be in gym class and one time the teacher was so mad at me, he took a basketball and yelled, "What's the matter?! Are you afraid of the ball?!" and he threw it at me, "Boom!" and hit me square in the face. He was brutal. . . . I'd go to school, and it was pretty much hell, and I'd go home, and that was always hell. Even my older sister had become controlling. She couldn't control the situation in our house, so she tried to control other people. I tried to keep the peace, but I realized that I couldn't. I realized that there would never be an end to the madness at school or at home, so I just became rebellious -- not in a bad way. But I just said, "I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do." And I did. I started really figuring out how I was going to do the things I thought were important, like going to college. No matter what anybody else thought, said, or did.

Strengthened undoubtedly by positive experiences such as the ongoing benefits of his special status during his early childhood, Bob was able to assert some control over his own life. However, what others thought, said, and did *as role models* actually was very important to Bob and to the other participants in this study. As they considered their own conditions in

life as well as their dreams for the future, they often looked to exemplary others for clues to achieving their goals. By what processes did they crystallize their aspirations and adjust their senses of self? How did they become aware of those processes and learn to apply them in their own lives? These questions form the basis of the following section on “ascending cross-class identification.”

Ascending Cross-Class Identification

Seeing people I knew going off to college had everything to do with my wanting to go. No counselors or teachers told me to go or helped me. I had to look at people from the class above mine and figure out how to make the things they were doing happen for me.

Theresa

One cannot dream that which one cannot imagine. As “castles in the air,” dreams are as vague as mists: diaphanous, amorphous, impalpable as breath. To “put the foundations under them” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 616), specificity is required. Specificity demands definition, delineation, description, detail. It necessitates knowing, and access to knowledge often proved difficult for this study’s interviewees to acquire.

I believe that one of the most difficult challenges that the participants in this study faced in their journeys toward college was knowing what they should aspire to become. Generally speaking, this relates only peripherally to the profession that one should choose. And applied specifically to the participants, it had far less -- perhaps nothing -- to do with personality. It had absolutely nothing to do with exchanging their genetic blueprints, natural talents, or innate characteristics for someone else’s. To the contrary, their challenge was to figure out how to become themselves.

In essence, to become themselves meant that the participants needed to shed those limitations imposed by their environments which inhibited the development of their natural potential. With this dross discarded, the participants would have better opportunities to identify and to shape the precious metal that was left and that comprised their true characteristics.

To accomplish this was tricky. First, the participants, often as young children, needed to recognize those limitations imposed by their environments as the debilitators to healthy development that they actually were. Second, they needed to generate at least a vague conceptualization of themselves as free of these limitations. Third, they needed to believe that their imagined freedom was deserved and was right for them. Fourth, they needed a means of learning in some detail what freedom was really like. And fifth, they needed a means to attain freedom. Ascending cross-class identification is a primary process by which the participants were able to accomplish these tasks by freeing themselves from some of society's limitations..

In an earlier section of this chapter called "Special Status," we encountered Mary as a child whose aunt introduced her to the world of a little white girl with a lot of books and the ability to read:

She had these books, and she was reading. I thought, "Oh, I would like to be able to read like that," but I didn't have any books. I used to tell my aunt how I really would like to have some books, and she would say, "Well, maybe one day you will get some." I couldn't understand how this little girl could have so many books and we didn't have any. I would go home and try to read the one book that we had, an old Bible, as best I could. There were so many words that I could not understand, and, of course, my mom and dad couldn't really help me. But I would just try to read the best I could.

Mary clearly recognized that the standards under which black people in her community lived were unjust limitations. Though she was from an extremely poor Southern black family, and, as such, the antithesis of the middle class white child whom she met, she experienced what I refer to as “ascending cross-class identification.” Simply stated, this means that Mary imagined the integration of many books and the ability to read into her own life style. This was remarkable since she experienced cross-race as well as ascending cross-class identification in the segregated South of the 1950s where even young children understood the implications of apartheid. In her identification with the little white girl, Mary refused to accept the implications of their racial difference. Thus, she exemplified those rare individuals who somehow do not internalize the corrupt implications or customs of the society in which they are born and raised. Instead, Mary seems to have adjusted her self-concept by bringing it into alignment with the reality of the Other, the little girl with books.

Closely connected to Mary’s identification with the Other was her remarkable intention to transcend the purpose of reading fiction as pleasure and to use it as a vehicle to a transformed self-concept, as we see in the following passage:

Now, I remember that one of my teachers gave me a book. I’ll never forget it; it was called *Children Everywhere*. . . . There was a story in the book about a woman who worked hard and did her job every day and her husband was always complaining about the work she was doing. So she told him to stay home and do her work and she would go and do his job. He took her up on this, and she could do his job, but he couldn’t do hers. And I thought, “There has to be another job that I can do. I don’t want to do this job for the rest of my life.”

For Mary, reading was also a source for research on what her transformed self should be:

I used to pray as a child So I said, “Lord, I know there is something else out there for me to do. I can’t live like this for the rest of my life.” And I

thought that through reading, I would find help to change my life. I just wanted to do something different.

As the preceding passages illustrate, Mary resolved to use reading as a means of providing some details to an imagined life without the educational, social, and economic limitations that had been her only experience. Mary's deliberate search through her small world of literature for ways to change her life is extraordinary in a young child, perhaps more so than the realignment of her self-concept after meeting the white girl. As an indicator of character, intention, which marks the former, is far superior to coincidence, which resulted in the latter. Both may be causal in Mary's subsequent matriculation and success at college.

Certainly causal through ascending cross-class identification were Mary's meeting a college student and the record keeping responsibilities she was given by her teacher:

I knew that I could do something different with my life when I was twelve years old. . . . I met my first grade teacher's brother who was in college at the time. I had never heard of college. I knew my teachers had to have gotten training somewhere, but this was the first time I had direct knowledge of college, and he made it sound like a terrific place to be. He was going to be a teacher. I remember telling my mother I would like to be a teacher. She said that it would be good for me to become a teacher, that people always need to be taught, that there will always be children who need teachers. . . . I started thinking then that I wanted to become a teacher.

Another important thing that happened to me was that in seventh grade, I had the same instructor who had taught me in fourth and fifth grades. He let me keep attendance. He put me in charge of the register because he thought I had good penmanship. In fact, my penmanship was better than his. I would record the children's names, days present, days absent, what have you. That was fascinating to me. I would do all this recording and take it to the principal's office and he would send it to, I think, the superintendent. So I felt certain that I wanted to be a teacher.

In these examples, Mary used ascending cross-class identification to gather information about college and about teaching that would help to put the foundation under her

dream of changing her life. Similarly, Nancy talked about an opportunity for ascending cross-class identification provided by an elementary school teacher who took her to Oak Park, a middle class town, to hear a lecture given by Edgar Rice Burroughs, one of Oak Park's famous native sons:

I remember thinking at the lecture that the whole audience was middle class, a group of people that I had never had anything to do with before. These people had time to go and listen and had bought the tickets to do so. My teacher probably made almost nothing in salary. And she had two tickets because I was too young to go by myself. The prize was given for reading a number of books, and she must have known that I would be the winner and that would be a meaningful experience for me. If they are still alive, those teachers, I should go back and thank them all, but they weren't young then and that was a long time ago.

I think I was a little bored by Burroughs' talk, but the ambiance and what was going on around me were important. . . . Oak Park's library was a very handsome building of the type that I wouldn't have seen anything like it at the time. It is a Frank Lloyd Wright building. There were three bronze busts of three important people who came from Oak Park. The main, central one was Burroughs flanked by Ernest Hemingway and Frank Lloyd Wright. . . . I take my students on architecture tours, so we go to the Wright buildings. I was very impressed by the houses in Oak Park when I saw them with my teacher, the first time I had ever been there, even though I didn't know who Wright was at the time. But the houses! There are reflections of Oak Park in this house where I have lived for so many years.

In this first exposure to the middle class, Nancy observed some of the significant differences between the way of life that she knew and the privileged existences of these Oak Park residents. As a college professor of the humanities, Nancy takes her students to see the Wright architecture in the Chicago area, and in her home, she surrounds herself with Wrightian influences. Yet, she attributed to serendipity a more immediately direct influence on her ability to go to college.

Just as most of the participants in the study gave considerable credit to luck, coincidence, or God for opportunities to experience ascending cross-class identification, Nancy attributes to luck an intervention from the larger community which helped to expand her horizons and firm her resolve to earn a college degree. Nancy's stroke of fortune came in the form of boys, students from the University of Chicago, who introduced her to "another world":

I went out with one who was actually from Oak Park, and he took me out to eat at a restaurant that had tables with real table cloths on them, and I pretended that I wasn't hungry because I was afraid I'd do something wrong, so I just watched him. And then you pick up what you do at those restaurants, and when you get older you can -- well, now I can eat in restaurants. . . .

I knew I wanted to be in this new world -- the old one didn't fit -- but I was very uncomfortable with it for a while. I remember even pretending. One of these boys took me to a concert of classical music which I needed in order to do some kind of report in a music class. A girlfriend of mine came along because she was in the same class. We chattered throughout the concert instead of listening to the music because I knew that if I listened, I wouldn't have anything to say about it because it was not music I had heard before. The Oak Park boy took me to a performance at the Shubert, to a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, thinking that it wouldn't be so sophisticated it would be over my head, and I thought it was wonderful. I was so glad that I could appreciate it. I was able to see that there was something there although I was afraid of it. I didn't know enough to be confident that I wouldn't trip up all over myself somehow and not know what to do. These guys were helpful in ushering me into a place, a way of life, where I could be comfortable.

Nancy's example, replayed time and again by other participants, illustrates the powerful motivation derived from ascending cross-class identification. From reading and from her trip as a seventh grader to Oak Park, Nancy knew that there was an alternative to the way that she lived and the world that she knew. Her exposure to the students from the University of Chicago gave her not only a prolonged view of that new world, but also initial experience

in its navigation. And as new learning so often does in our lives, it made Nancy uncomfortable. Reverberating throughout the literature on first-generation college students and in most of the participants' stories is the premise that straddling two cultures is difficult (Lara, 1992; London, 1996; Rendon, 1996; Rendon, Terenzini, & Upcraft, 1995).

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that since there were many middle class students in Nancy's high school, ostensibly there were ample opportunities for her to identify with and to gain exposure to the middle class long before her introduction to the University of Chicago students. However, she did not. This points, I think, to two factors that are crucial to the transformation of self as a result of ascending cross-class identification. First, transforming one's self requires information about the Other that may not be readily available to the outsider. As Weber (1968) points out, membership in a status group requires a particular style of life designated by badges such as habits of consumerism, clothes, vocabulary, and social conventions. Membership, then, requires knowledge of what these badges are and how, as well as the wherewithal, to execute them. While superficial identification with the Other is easily achieved, in order to integrate the new identification, one must begin to know the Other. Only then can one effectively begin to adjust and align one's self-concept.

The second point about ascending cross-class identification is that in order to know the Other, one needs exposure to the Other's world. Unlike the middle class students at Nancy's high school, the University of Chicago students welcomed Nancy into their world and provided her with guided tours. Perhaps Nancy saw them as more desirable hosts since they knew the world of the university, a world that she longed to enter. Still, no matter how

helpful the University of Chicago students were, her excursions were uncomfortable because she was a *tourist* and not a *resident*. It would take time before she achieved Weberian certification. In fact, she went to junior college where the application process was not necessary before she got the nerve to apply to the university. "My high school must have had advisors," she states, "but . . . I was one of the working class kids who didn't fit into the group that was going to college." She was so afraid of the application process that she did not tell anyone -- not her family, not even her University of Chicago friends -- when she applied to the University of Chicago until she had been accepted and her financial aid had been secured.

Welcoming exposure to a new world was the force that tipped the balance in Nancy's favor by strengthening her ability to adjust and align her self concept. This exposure allowed her to begin to know and to internalize what her transformed self should be. Because her exposure was kindly, her degree of fear and loss of dignity during the process must surely have been diminished. Under less fortunate circumstances, her exposure to a different world could have been accompanied by derision at her every misstep from those who already belonged. In that case, a permanent retreat may have been her response. This is very important because it underscores the need to provide low socioeconomic status students who would be among the first in their families to attend college with welcoming exposures to better worlds. In a case such as Nancy's where the equation for a student's entry into college and subsequent college completion breaks down, exposure to a new world may be the major contributing factor, other than the student herself, in the student's academic success.

Fortunately for many of the participants in this study, wonderful people who would be pivotal subjects for ascending cross-class identification stepped forward in their lives. For instance, among other interventions, Ray recalled the role played by the Hovey's in helping him to conceptualize a different life for himself:

I got the idea that I wanted to earn a college degree from several interventions in my life. One was that I had been a Fresh Air kid and had been sent to camp outside New York City. Sponsored by *The New York Herald Tribune*, the Fresh Air Program matched people from the New York City suburbs and contiguous states with children from the inner city. "Camp" was a two week period when children such as I could be a part of someone else's family in an entirely different environment. . . . When I was eight, I went to Ma and Pa Hovey's in Pennsylvania. That experience opened my eyes to a whole new world. Pa Hovey commuted by train to his job in Philadelphia where he was a writer for a newspaper. He was up in age, so he worked just two or three days a week. . . . She had been an English teacher. They had a son who was one year younger than I was.

There were lots of books at Ma and Pa Hovey's house, and every night, Ma Hovey would read wonderful stories to Robert and me. And when we sat down for dinner, they always talked about things and asked our opinion. Now, as an eight year old, I didn't have lots of opinions, but they would engage both me and Robert. I was shy, but they were expert at finding subjects that I could talk about. . . . The table was set with dishes that matched, and everyone had a fork, spoon, knife, and napkin. This was new for me since at home we never used both a spoon and a fork. . . .

The Hoveys lived at the end of the street on an acre of land. Behind their property was a huge farm, so the land seemed to go on forever. . . . The Hoveys were not rich, but they were well off. They were educated, and they could do whatever they wanted to do. For example, every year we would go to New Jersey to the seashore. Sometimes we would stay at a little inn for three days. . . . Pa Hovey would drive us to New Jersey, and I remember thinking that some day I wanted to be able to do those things for myself and whatever family I happened to have.

The Hoveys also illustrated by their example how Ray could aspire to change his life by earning a college degree. They aided in the crystallization of his plans by providing knowledge of how he could finance a college education:

Just how I would get to go to college was suggested to me one summer when I was at the Hovey's. They had a niece, Zoe, who came to visit them. Her parents were divorced, and she was a college student who was working and paying most of her own way through school. Ma and Pa Hovey told me about how they had worked their way through school, too. They had come from families that were educated but not wealthy. Ma Hovey's father had died when she was very young, so it had been necessary for her to do as much for herself as she could. Pa Hovey had begun college, but his studies had been interrupted by the war. After his return from the war, he had worked while he finished his degree. Here was living proof that you did not have to be rich to go to college. You had to want to go to college, and you had to work to stay there. I realized that you did not have to be Caucasian or from a particular ethnic group to go to college because I had wonderful teachers -- black, white, Jewish -- all of whom must have gone to college.

Ray also discovered the masses who enjoyed middle class status. He told me about his participation in a music program that offered free tickets to New York City public school students:

On days when I had a ticket to a performance, I would take the bus or walk across Central Park to the Met or to Symphony Hall after school. I was repeatedly fascinated by the staging, the costumes, the music, and the opulent settings. At the Met there were a main floor, a mezzanine, and two balconies. There were huge chandeliers, Corinthian columns, gold walls, and plush seats. I marveled at the audiences of white people who could take off during the day to go to the opera or symphony. For the most part, I saw no minorities in the audience or on the stage. But I did get to see Marian Anderson once, I think at Symphony Hall. My mother's response to my adventures in becoming cultured was, "That's a junk! Why do you go to that stuff?" Yet, if I were watching a classical music program on television, she was quite prone to watch it with me. And we had records by Mario Lanza that she enjoyed playing. Actually, we had loads of wonderful records, but most of them were by popular Spanish artists.

In these and in many other examples from their stories, Ray, Nancy, and Mary exemplified the histories of most of the individuals interviewed for this study as they experienced ascending cross-class identification. They learned through the process of ascending cross-class identification to recognize aspects of middle class life that they desired and believed that they deserved. Through their associations with the Other, they used ascending cross-class identification to conceptualize important specific information entailed in becoming and being free from the shackles of underprivilege that they had known. With a basic appreciation of their own personalities, genetic blueprints, natural talents, and other innate characteristics, they could begin burning away the environmental legacies of educational, economic, social, and mental disenfranchisement to uncover their true selves. In this manner, the interviewees prepared themselves to enter the educated middle class by earning a college degree.

CHAPTER IX

ACCESS, SUCCESS, EGRESS: THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

I was not recognized by my teachers as somebody who ought to go to college. . . . At the state university where I went, vastly disappointed that I couldn't go to a school where they taught aeronautical engineering -- like Purdue, MIT, Cal Tech, or the University of Michigan -- they took anybody at first. The dean from the College of Engineering told us, "Only one out of four of you will graduate. Half of you will be gone after the first semester." Sometimes the instructors were good, sometimes they weren't. But the standards were unremitting. I took classes where two-thirds of the classes flunked.

Jack

If many of the first-generation college students in this study could not depend on their high schools to help them with the process of getting to college, they often depended on their own resources or on their communities since their parents tended to know less about the subject than did the students themselves. Most were blessed with the pioneering spirit, but for those who had never heard of a college entrance exam, had no understanding of where to get -- let alone how to complete -- college application forms, had no money and no concept of how to attain financial aid, and had believed the message from others that they were not college material, the college going process presented a serious problem.

This is readily understandable since getting into college can be a frightening process for anyone, even those students who are given the best that their schools can offer in terms of academic preparation and college advising. Students who have the benefit of family members with college degrees, ample financial resources to cover college costs, and familiarity with the college milieu may still be insecure about the college entry process. Many

parents who send their children to elite high schools where they receive excellent educations often expend additional funds on test preparation courses and private college counseling to give their children an extra edge in the college access competition. Yet, these students from privileged educational backgrounds find that during their senior year of high school, “April,” the time when they can expect acceptance or rejection letters from the colleges to which they have applied, “is the cruellest month” (Eliot, 1952, p. 37).

How, then, did many of the first-generation college graduates in this study who were at the opposite end of the spectrum not only gain access to college but also manage socially, financially, and academically once they had gotten in? How did they navigate between the two worlds of home and college? What were those qualities that they and others displayed which aided in their success? I address these questions in this chapter.

Getting in the Door

My first choice was the college of engineering. My second choice was surveying. They assigned me to English because my best high school English teacher had given me a good report. I loved him. He couldn't stand the torture by the students during the Cultural Revolution so he ran under a truck. It brings tears to my eyes.

Gaoke

How did the interviewees in this study succeed in gaining access to college? For many of them, the routes to college entry were alternative ones. Creative, lucky, resourceful, resilient, and intentional, many of the participants frequently battled their own ignorance along with the indifference of others in the college going process -- and won. They were able to create for themselves the possibility of getting into college despite their fears that they had not been adequately prepared for the rigors of college academics, that they just were not

smart enough to go to college, that they could not amass enough money to pay for college, and that they would not be able to figure out the maze of the college entry process.

In this section I explore two basic issues of college access that were of great concern to most of this study's participants: institutional support, or the role of the high schools in providing these individuals with the college counseling/advising that they needed; and peer support, or the role that their fellow students played in providing the participants with whatever the high schools did not. The case histories are rich with examples of how the interviewees successfully countered barriers to college entry.

One such example is provided by Theresa who did not receive the academic advising in high school that a student reasonably should have expected. As Theresa related, the idea that she would go to college came to her late in her high school career:

The whole time I was growing up, we had to sit down and do our homework, but we didn't talk about college because my parents didn't have that kind of experience. College wasn't expected. Upper class families had that idea. My parents didn't think along the lines of sending us away to school. We were made to feel that our homework was important, but we were never told to go beyond high school.

I guess I never even thought about going to college when I was in high school until almost senior year when I realized, "Wow! I actually have somewhat decent grades, and I have to do this, this, and this to get into college." But it was almost like it was almost too late to be able to get in. I started to look at my situation, and I found that I didn't really have the grades and I didn't have the money to go away to college.

Most of my friends weren't going off to college. I got along with all kinds of people so I did have groups of friends with no intention of ever going to college. But I also had friends who were from the popular crowd, and they were all planning to go. It was expected of them, and "What school are you going to?" was how they thought about it. I wanted to go where they were going and do some of the things they were going to do, but I hadn't done enough planning. In my school system, I didn't feel that I was directed or

made to feel like high school was just a stepping stone and you go on from there. . . . I had no preparation or explanation about how to go through the process of admissions and choosing a college. When I actually had to go through it, I was really lost.

Theresa was a working class student who felt that because she was not a member of the middle class, no one at school ever advised or encouraged her to see high school as a stepping stone to college. But noticing her middle class acquaintances getting ready for college prompted her to assess her own situation. And in a dramatic illustration of same-class identification, she noticed women much older than she at the restaurant where she was a waitress who were doing the same job that she was and for the same salary. She realized that her own future was mirrored in the present of many women in her own social class if she could not radically change her prospects, and she was deeply troubled by the probability that she would not be able to get a stimulating job with only a high school diploma. Then one of the kids at school mentioned that one had to take the ACT (American College Test -- a standardized test used in the college admissions process) in order to get into college:

I found out that one had to take an ACT test almost after the fact and had to slide myself into a very quick date that was still available before we graduated. I hurried up and got registered. I took the test, and I got a nine! When I realized how badly I did, I didn't want to tell anybody because I thought that everyone would think I was stupid, and I thought that I must be. The score of nine told me that I was severely mentally handicapped. This made me feel like I was nothing; that I couldn't do anything. I thought, "Well, I can't even get into the community college with this score." At that time, the community college wanted a score of fifteen or higher. Then I said to myself, "But I'm not failing out of school, and I'm not on probation, but how come I'm so dumb?"

Then one of the teachers who had sponsored a trip to Europe that I had gone on told me about the ACT prep class held at night. I had told him that I had taken the ACT and had tested like a monkey and had gotten a nine. I knew that I read very slowly and my math skills were bad. I didn't have a

strong science background, but at least after taking the ACT prep class, I was able to raise my score by six points to get into the community college.

Theresa's example supports the finding in much of the literature on first-generation college students that good advisement is crucial to their success (Chaffee, 1992; Chatman, 1994; Hewlett, 1981; Padron, 1992; Simelton, 1994; Stein, 1992; Warner, 1992). Her example marks just one of the various degrees of dereliction of duty that participants report having experienced at the hands of high school counselors because of individual or institutional race, ethnic, or class bias. Indeed, Theresa, Nancy, and some others of the participants were so cut off from the college advisement process in their high schools that those processes may as well not have existed. Michael, who attended a prestigious private high school, was closer to the other end of the spectrum, but still in need of intervention by a fair minded professor who happened to discover how Michael was being advised. As Michael put it:

He asked me, "Where are you applying to school?" I told him and he said, "No! You belong some place else. You go ahead and apply to Brown, you apply to Harvard, you apply to Yale because schools like those are where you belong." Now, I was aware that the college counselor . . . did not think that such schools were where I should have been looking. This English instructor just stopped me short. He said, "No! You belong some place else." With that in mind, I applied to Yale, Harvard, Brown, Dartmouth, Bates, and Carleton. I went back and talked with the counselor, and he said the new choices were fine. The one word of advice he offered me was that given my personality, Carleton or Bates might be where I wanted to go because I wanted "to be the big fish in the little pond." I took that advice to heart.

Michael experienced a change of heart, applied to Yale, and became a Yale graduate.

While Carleton and Bates are undoubtedly excellent schools, it is interesting, to say the least, that the counselor advised an impressionable youth to select those schools over the others that

were on Michael's new list. In addition, the counselor suggested to Michael that his advice was to protect Michael's own interests. Even though Michael had attended highly selective private schools his entire life, he would be the first person in the history of his family to go to college. On his own, he knew nothing of what to expect from college. He had not questioned the counselor's earlier advice that he apply to Wesleyan, and his parents certainly had no reason to question it. His solid B+ average and SAT scores of 680 on the math section and 690 on the verbal did not suggest to him that his counselor may have been lowering his horizons with regard to college choice. And after his English teacher intervened, the counselor's clever statement that Michael wanted to be the big fish in the little pond may have conjured up pictures in Michael's head of his being way out of his league at an Ivy League college. The difference between Michael's case and Theresa's was the degree of malfeasance committed by their high school counselors. Neither had been adequately served.

Both Michael's and Theresa's examples suggest a means by which first-generation college students manage in the world of academia: they make connections with others who will help them to arrive at and survive in college when those whose job it is to do so fail to carry out their duty. Often help comes from other students. Their experience -- or what they understood to have been or what they retained from their experience -- becomes the template by which the first-generation college student's path is drawn. Their role is significant, and the data attest to the benefit that they bring to their peers (Rendon, Terenzini, & Upcraft, 1994). Indeed, some of the participants reported that their peers provided the only help that they received in maneuvering the complex process of college entry, and that without that help, success in getting into college would have taken them a lot longer if they had achieved

success at all. Finding that information from their high school counselors, advisors, and teachers about the college going process was protected information and that they were not privileged to share it, many of the participants saw their peers as their major resource. Ironically, the least help with getting into college was available to those students who most needed it. Theresa explained how this “least help” enabled her to get from the community college to the university:

When I got ready to leave CLC (the College of Lake County), I had a friend who was going to Southern. He helped me to do the application and learn whatever I was able to learn about the college going process. His parents hadn't gone to college either, but somehow they seemed to know more than my parents ever did. He helped me through a lot of the questions I had. I didn't understand that banks could sell you loans. There were informational meetings on the different floors of the dorms that my friend told me about, so I would go to the meetings on my floor and then turn around and go to the meetings on the same topic on his floor. I had a double chance to learn. I became an expert on financial aid so I could help other people who were like I had been.

When I decided to go to Southern, it was only because I knew someone who was going there and I thought I could afford it. I had worked for two years saving money while I went to CLC part time. I sold my car and everything else that I owned, but I only had enough money to get me through one year. And I thought, “What am I going to do? I can't go back home now. I've quit a very good job with benefits -- a good job for not having any education -- and if I go back home people are going to think I'm a failure. I'm going to feel like a failure, and I can't be a failure.” So I started looking for a way to manage. I found that I had enough credit hours to apply to be an RA at the dorm, so I tried to get a job and they actually hired me. That way I could manage. If I hadn't had a friend who went to Southern and who helped me, I wouldn't have been there. I kinda felt like I was following that person at the time.

While the help that came to Theresa in getting to the university was not expert, at least it was from the vantage point of one who had a year's experience more than Theresa, who had none. Theresa's story underscores the positive role of peer mentors/advisors in

participants' college entry experiences. But in terms of leveling the playing field for these first-generation college students, peer mentors fell far short. It is no wonder that professionals are hired to help students manage the maze of getting to college.

When Jack, another participant, decided to go to the university, no one at school or anywhere else advised him on anything. No one in his community inspired him to go to college, and he was acquainted with no college graduates. He decided with a high school friend that they would go to college to study engineering, even though he had no clear idea of what engineers did. His idea to study engineering sprang primarily from his involvement in a special interest that he happened upon, the design and building of gas powered model airplanes. At the university, he joined a fraternity right away, which was, he believes, an excellent thing to do:

I joined a group of young men who were learning to manage by handling the finances and food and maintaining a mansion of a home. We worked together. They taught us manners. We wore jackets to dinner every night. We opened dinner with a prayer. We sang songs at the end. We were taught table manners by the pledge master. We learned how to meet and greet people, how to treat a woman. If you're going upstairs, she goes first. Going down, you go first. You hold the door. They told me how to part my hair and act decent. I learned a lot of social graces I never would have learned for a long time. It was a great polishing experience. The guys who were in the fraternity with me are dying off now, but they are still friends.

As one of the oldest participants in the study, Jack benefitted from an opportunity that may not have been readily available to many first generation college students entering the university over forty years later, as did Theresa, Michael, and Carmen. It has become expensive to join a fraternity or sorority, and their wholesomeness in the eyes of many seems to have diminished. Yet, the necessity and benefits of bonding with peers was recurrent in the

life stories from the oldest to the youngest of this study's participants. Once they had gained access to college, confronting issues of identity within the socio-political contexts of the campus and of the home environment became critical concerns for the interviewees. To answer these concerns, the participants endeavored to construct safe passage-ways for themselves between the culture of home and the new culture of college.

Cold Comfort Zone: Entering the Culture of College

The time that I first started going to college was the most traumatic time of my whole life and I didn't know if I was going to survive it. I would have accidents. I broke my arm, I broke my leg, I crashed the car. These things just kept happening to me, but then things changed. I can almost tell you the minute when someone said, "You should set limits between yourself and other people."

Bob

Writers such as Levine and Nidiffer (1996), London (1996), Rendon (1996), and Rendon, Terenzini, and Upcraft (1994) have explored the transition to college of many first-generation college students. They, as well as others, have found that factors such as family, peer, and faculty support are crucial to the success of first-generation college students. The interviews that I conducted produced similar findings but also appeared to shed additional light on the complex issues of identity, family loyalty, and the need to belong, or "belongingness," in the college going experiences of this study's participants. In this section I examine the concept of belonging or the student as *resident* rather than *tourist*.

The interviewees in this study stressed that establishing a comfort zone within the collegiate environment was a key component of their academic success. However, the ability to feel comfortable at college required a student's personal reconciliation of his or her identity as a college student with his or her identity as a representative of home. This did not mean

that the student had to retain the same cultural icons and traditions in each setting. Rather, it meant that he or she recognized and accepted the differences in customs, conditions, experiences, and badges that existed between the two cultures. Thus, by becoming a *resident*, or one who is at home in one's surroundings, the student could avoid the dislocation and gawkishness of the *tourist*, or one who does not belong or is just passing through. While these roles were most frequently played out in the non-academic experiences of this study's interviewees, the degree of comfort that students felt in the total college environment may have had a commensurate effect on their academic achievement.

A few people in the study were not new as college students to straddling two cultures, but all were straddling a new culture, the culture of college, along with the culture of home for the first time. And the complexity of breaking away from home as London (1989) has depicted it often seemed more complex still in the impassioned telling of some of the participants. Yet, many of them realized that a key to successful biculturation was recognizing and accepting the different attributes of both cultures. Mary provided a vivid example of the dichotomy between the culture of college and the culture of home:

I grew up with my mother and father, and I grew up poor. I went to Tuskegee and started living with people who were upper middle class. . . . I got to meet all calibers of people. Except for leaving home and going to Tuskegee, I took my first trip out of the county with these people. I stayed in my first hotel. . . .

When I first went to their home, I hardly knew what to do because I had not been accustomed to going in a room, a bathroom, to brush my teeth. I grew up going outside to use the toilet. I brushed my teeth standing on the back porch. Their whole life style, the living experience, was totally new to me. But the kids had to do chores and stuff, even though their father could give them anything. Like my dad, he made them do things. I was accustomed

to working, and everything was just beautiful for me, all the way around. . .

I first got to know about other cultures through babysitting. The husband in the first family I babysat for was from Zimbabwe. I was exposed to African culture at their house. I got to eat African dishes. Their house was the first place I had ever eaten out of a silver spoon and at a table set with china.

Being at the table with this family was to me an experiential avenue of my education that I could not get from a book. Getting to be around people from other parts of the world taught me that when you're with people of other cultures, you can adapt. And when I go back home with my family and get that fruit jar and that tin plate, I can adapt. I think that's what education is about. It's a continuous process. . . . While I would listen to them at dinner, I would ask questions. And the next day the wife would congratulate me on the questions that I had asked. I was learning a lot just by contributing to the conversation.

In this aspect of her passage from the culture of home to the culture of college, Mary maneuvered successfully as a resident of both the lower class and the upper middle class. She lived in zones of comfort in both worlds. Two reasons for her success seem key. First, she simply enjoyed the beauty in her new surroundings. A well appointed house, scintillating dinner conversations, excellent food, and the affirmation of being included as one who belonged enabled Mary to appreciate her new environment and to be improved educationally and socially by it at the same time. Second, that she was encouraged to exercise her voice, to be heard as well as seen, was immensely validating for her. That her employer congratulated her on the questions that she asked during dinners affirmed her intelligence and her worth as one who contributed to the conversation rather than simply learning from it. Mary's employers did not treat her as if she were an outsider or inferior, and she, in turn, neither felt alienated or inferior nor exhibited signs that she perceived herself as not belonging. She was free to learn whatever she could without fear of being thought a fool, just as she was

at home. Her status with her employers provided her with “an experiential avenue of her education that she could not get from a book.” In her statement that she could adapt to the fruit jar and tin plate at home, Mary proved that the Wolfeism, “You can’t go home again,”⁴ is not true for those who *want* to go home again. This point was demonstrated repeatedly by most of the interviewees who did “go home again” as often as they could.

Other participants seemed to turn Wolfe’s adage on its head with the acknowledgment that it is those who are rooted firmly in the old world who are immobilized. They cannot meet the family member who is a college student in the student’s new environment with the old familiarity. Entering the culture of the college has given the first-generation college student flexibility, however uncomfortable it may have been initially. But it has limited the freedom of loved ones who have little or no hope of joining this new group through ascending cross-class identification. Their previous freedom to meet on a common plateau has been canceled until such time as the student reenters the culture of home. Any meeting as near equals must take place strictly on the student’s terms. This is generally understood, if not articulated, by students and parents alike, and for the students it may cause both guilt and grief. The study’s participants alleviated such pain for themselves and their families as they came to understand their own senses of vulnerability as first-generation college students.

In part, that understanding entailed distinguishing the relative likelihood with which different family members might switch their status in the college environment from *tourist* to *resident*. It is extremely difficult for one who is firmly rooted in the culture of home to enter

⁴ *You Can’t Go Home Again*, a work by American novelist Thomas Clayton Wolfe, was published posthumously in 1940.

the student's new world through ascending cross-class identification because the internalization of information necessary for transformation to take place cannot occur without a basis for belief that one can "become" the Other. And in the families of many of the first-generation college students in the study, such adjustment and alignment of self-concept for parents, especially, was almost impossible. Siblings, however -- even much older siblings of some of the participants -- did make the trek successfully from home to college graduate, following the example of the participants, the first in the family to go to college.

But for the parents of most of the participants in the study, the idea that they themselves may have become educated was a dream beyond possibility. Velma, for instance, described her father as a brilliant man who only got as far as third grade in school. He had basically taught himself to read and write. When people from their community needed to apply for social security, Velma recalled that they would come to her home to get her father to write letters for them. Even though her mother had an eighth grade education, had grown up in a middle class family, and had married down by marrying a sharecropper, Velma gave full credit to her father for influencing the intelligence of his children:

My father came along at a time that was not conducive to his pursuing his education. He was very good at math and would read and discuss politics and all those things with anybody. Our teachers at school learned to respect him because he was articulate and could expound on social/political issues. He and my math teacher became good friends over the course of a year.

I read a lot as a child. There were *Time*, *Life*, and *Look* magazines around our house. My father would subscribe to these magazines, and, back in those days, they wouldn't put you in jail if you didn't pay for them, which was often the case.

My father always wanted someone to go to college, and when I went, every now and then, as a total surprise, my father would come to visit me at

school. I wouldn't know he was coming. Someone would announce over the intercom, "Velma Brown, your father is here!" He would be sitting in the lobby. I would go out and see him, and we would chat. Every now and again, he would give me ten or twenty dollars or whatever.

My friends knew my father's nickname was Slick, and they would laugh and tease me about Slick's coming to visit unannounced like that. Later they said they were kind of envious because their parents never came to visit them. The only time your parents came to see you was maybe at graduation. You would take the bus to school and back home again at the beginning and end of the semester. My father came for my graduation. I was proud of that. In retrospect, his visits had been enough to tell me that he was proud of me. At the time, because I was young and stupid, I did not appreciate that.

It could be argued that Velma failed to appreciate her father's visits not because she was "young and stupid" but because she loved him and saw both him and herself as vulnerable in a society whose rules he did not understand. A foreigner to Velma's world, her father may not have comprehended that etiquette in her society, based on practicality, required him to plan his visits and let her know his plans. He seemed not to understand that taking an unannounced trip to visit a student at college might be much more of a risk than traveling two miles on Sunday to visit his neighbors unannounced on the next farm. With no real concept of the subtle events in the life of a college student or the badges of belonging such as appearance and language, he was without the information needed to fit in for even a very short while. The college had occasions, including graduation, set aside for outsiders such as parents when judgments of them as Other could be suspended. At all other times, without an invitation, they would enter at their own risk. If they did not portray the characteristics that would mark them as belonging, discreet derision would not be off limits.

To assume that Velma was ashamed of her father would be, I believe, an over simplification as surely as it would be to assume that her father was presumptuous and cashed

in some of his collateral as her parent to impose himself upon the college setting. Both assessments would cloud the real issue which concerns identities made vulnerable by not belonging. Unvarying across the cases was the need for this study's participants to achieve a sense of belonging in the life of the college.

In the new world of college, these first-generation students were vulnerable not only in the ways of new people in new surroundings everywhere, but also in terms of the shifting sands of identities in flux. They were acquiring and processing the information that they needed to become authentic members of the college society. Their identities were being adjusted as they learned and began to gain fluidity in their new ways of being. Acquiring the badges of college students raised their personal collateral and shifted their self-concepts from the extreme of inept imposter or *tourist* toward the goal of authenticity or *resident*. This was sometimes a slow process. Before they had made considerable advancement, they may not have acquired enough personal collateral to withstand the devaluation sustained when someone with whom they closely identified, who had none of the trappings of belonging, was interjected into their new environment. An immediate result for some students might have been guilt because of their newly emerging cultural identity and transitioning status as college student, embarrassment because the family member clearly did not belong, or other variations on sadness. But as Velma indicated, when they took the longer view, the result was validation. In every case, when the interviewees spoke of visits by family members who did not "belong," at least in retrospect the experiences were seen as important, affirming, and sources of pride. At this stage, the interviewees had achieved a much better understanding of their own multifaceted senses of vulnerability as first-generation college students.

Many participants spoke of the angst of seeing their parents in settings where they were vulnerable because they did not “belong.” Diane described the reactions of her parents to the college environment during graduation:

My parents came to my graduation when I got my bachelor’s degree. I was very proud. And there’s something that I remember to this day. It touches me. My mom was a shy person, and there was this big crowd and somehow she got separated from Dad, even though they sat together. I found her. She said, “Don’t leave me!” I said I wasn’t going to leave her, that she should stand right there by that post until I found Dad. Some of my friends came to my graduation, and the mother of one of my closest friends came. And they saw me, and that was nice. I didn’t have other family there. My graduation was very special.

When I got my M.A., I had a very unusual reaction. I got my hood and all that and just didn’t go to the ceremony. I think I didn’t go because for whatever reason, my dad didn’t want to go, and I knew that if my dad didn’t go, my mom wouldn’t go. So, what would be the point of my going? So, I just said, “Okay. I won’t go.” At first I was upset about their not going to the graduation, but they’d seen me walk for my B.A., so that was fine. If they had never seen me get a degree, I’d have been much more upset. Maybe my dad was afraid of the crowds.

Diane clearly voiced most of the participants’ understanding that their parents were tourists who may have been as “afraid of the crowds” when they began their infrequent forays into the college arena as the students themselves had been upon first arrival. Of course, as aspiring *residents* rather than *tourists*, the students had far more at stake. Their searches for zones of comfort and belonging were searches for identity and were played out in different ways within the college milieu. But their parents’ discomfort as *tourists* was painful for the students, too, and prompted their efforts to allay their parents’ fears and their own guilt for assuming a new identity as college student. They began the process of clarifying for themselves and demonstrating to their families that they had not abandoned the culture of

home but were becoming dual residents by acclimating to the new culture of the college. In most cases, they could not expect their parents to venture to campus very often, but on those rare occasions when they did, the participants endeavored to make their visits as culturally familiar as possible. For instance, when Theresa's family went to her campus for her graduation, she planned an outing to a nearby city to see a Cubs versus Cardinals baseball game, an event that her whole family would enjoy. Overall, this study's participants who were lucky enough to be visited by their families lessened their families' discomfort and their own remorse by diminishing the cultural distance between them. By so doing, they heightened their own levels of comfort within the collegiate environment. In the following section, I consider their efforts to acclimate to college life outside the college classroom.

Purpose, Process, and Place: An Agenda for the Informal Curriculum

The university gave me a work-study position where I could work for twenty hours a week to pay for my room and board. If I worked thirty hours a week, I could earn money towards my tuition as well. For me this was incredible good luck. LaCrosse was trying to attract more minorities to the campus. There were only two or three Hispanics at LaCrosse the whole time I was there. I didn't mind. I was just grateful for the chance to salvage my dream of earning a college degree.

Ray

Every fall, thousands of college students flock to the nation's campuses ostensibly with a single purpose: to claim scholastic success. For some, especially those whose families have established a tradition of college attendance, the experience may be a somewhat familiar journey. For others, especially for many of the first-generation college students among the throngs, it may require immense new sacrifices augmented by prayer, faith, and luck. Since getting in the door may have been so hard for the latter group, one might expect them to

focus far more strongly on the formal curriculum than on any other aspect of the collegiate learning experience. The stories of this study's interviewees, however, reveal an almost equal value on certain facets of the informal curriculum. Specifically, many of these first-generation college students had dual purposes, processes, and places for the most important learning that they would do. By means of the academic track, of course, their primary purpose was to earn a college degree using the formal curriculum as process and the classroom as place. The discussion here concerns the participants' second, but almost equally important, collegiate agenda: the discovery of self and others through avenues of the informal curriculum.

Life outside the college classroom, as depicted in these life stories, was a forum for continued learning. As the individuals I interviewed were able to lessen the dissonance between the culture of home and the culture of college, they became increasingly able to direct their attention to the pressing business of integration into the college environment. But beyond the objectives of determining who they were and how they would fit in, they were beset by additional questions of identity. What did they bring to the enrichment of the informal curriculum? What did they most need to learn from that curriculum? What time management strategies would they apply to their involvement in the informal curriculum? The daily events of their lives outside the classroom revealed interesting and varied rituals of "being" and "becoming." For most, the non-academic scene was the arena for discovering who they were and how they fit within the mosaic of college life.

For Michael, as was true for others in the study, life outside the classroom was a journey toward self discovery that entailed his recognition and internalization of his ethnicity as personal, social, and political dynamics. Since Michael had attended highly selective private

schools with only one or two Hispanics prior to college, when he arrived at Yale, he had not known very many Puerto Ricans outside his extended family. Right away Michael began hanging out with the Puerto Ricans on campus. There were only about a hundred, and the number was about evenly split between mainland and island Puerto Ricans. He became very good friends with the whole Latino crowd, as well as with others from the various racial/ethnic groups. But he found the island Puerto Ricans to be “a strange breed: They had no idea what a minority was because they were all coming from the upper strata of society on the island. They came with money and were a nice, happy, pampered bunch.” Michael perceived a definite tension between the island Puerto Ricans and the “wild-eyed urban types” with whom he identified.

Michael also spoke of an Asian roommate with whom he shared a passionate hatred.

As he told me:

We almost came to blows on more than one occasion. I was just getting into my cultural identity, and he was everything that I thought somebody from an ethnic background should not be. He was very “white.” As a student, he did well; his folks did well financially. He was a nice, good, solid, conservative Republican, and I . . . well, I was just in the process of transforming myself into a semi-radical mainland Puerto Rican from an urban environment who had spent summers and weekends in the inner city, even though I had never gone to school there. My Asian roommate wasn’t really like the people I had known from Francis Parker (the prep school where Michael received his high school education), and if he was, I didn’t notice their bad qualities until I saw them in him.

As a young man who was adjusting his self-concept to fit his perception of “semi-radical mainland” Puerto Rican even as he was maintaining and cultivating friendships with members of other groups, and even as he was openly critical of and hostile toward his Asian roommate who was not “ethnic” enough, Michael was being called to answer for being too

white himself:

I remember getting very upset at the time with one of my Latino buddies . . . I remember getting so angry with him because my roommates wanted to go out one night and do something, and I already had plans with some other friends. My buddy said, "Why don't you go hang out with your white friends, then?" I let him have it! I told him that the fact that he had no life in his college shouldn't put him on my case. In truth, I was the most social in our bunch; I have always worked all sides of the crowd really well. And one thing I am never hassled about is skin color. Sometimes I wonder about that. I think I have a sense of regret about that. I absolutely do have a sense of regret about that.

The necessity for Michael to defend being "too white" to Latinos was balanced by the necessity for him to defend being "too Puerto Rican" to whites:

Some people had a problem with me because they thought I was too Puerto Rican. They thought I was rabid about my ethnicity. One guy at one point said to me: "I don't understand why you're so Puerto Rican, why you have to be so . . . you have to throw it out there. Look at your friend, Freddie." Now, the guy speaking to me was white. Freddie was a Puerto Rican from the Bronx. He was dark, hip hop dressing, the whole works. And this guy says, "Besides, Freddie looks more Puerto Rican than you do." I just kind of shook my head. And I was immensely saddened because being Puerto Rican doesn't have anything to do with how anybody looks. It's a state of mind. It has nothing to do with race. It is absolute ethnicity. And he had no concept of that. I didn't even bother responding beyond, "you just don't understand." I didn't want to get into it. He didn't understand at all. I could be anyone's spitting image and I could be absolutely Puerto Rican while that person wouldn't be because it's an internal thing. The kind of ignorance that this guy was expressing just sticks in my craw.

As Michael's examples suggest, adjusting one's self-concept requires ongoing consideration of the perceptions, however erroneous, of others regarding what you should be. Should they be factored into the data base that will make up the new self-concept? Should they be ignored? Should they be used as a springboard for educating others? Michael's fair skin further complicated the identity issues he was negotiating during college. Specifically,

Michael was perplexed by the seeming inability of other intelligent people to understand race as a distinctly different construct from ethnicity. In the United States where the quality of one's life experiences may depend on the color of one's skin, Michael expressed concern that the ethnic anonymity inherent in his whiteness may have altered his consciousness of who he is:

I have a sense of regret about my skin color sometimes because skin color is something I just don't know how to deal with. And it's something I wouldn't have minded dealing with. I think I have a sense of regret from the perspective of loss of experience. I understand it in theory, but I don't have any practical experience with it except through osmosis and through group experiences on a couple of occasions. I mean, I was always the palest one in the bunch for the most part. But since the others looked so much more ethnic than I, there was enough visible ethnicity to cover me too, in some instances. Prejudice is not based on reason, and the bigot has no trouble extending his hatred to whoever associates with those he dislikes.

Experiences outside the classroom aided in Michael's emerging self-identification and enhanced his sense of belonging, two factors that appear crucial to the success of first-generation college students:

In sophomore year, you go to live in your residential college with about five hundred other people. You get your own dining hall and various other conveniences. As a freshman, I was very much into the Latino crowd, and I went about with my circle. Sophomore year is when we began to disperse a little bit even though the Latinos, both the Puerto Ricans and the Mexicans, all knew each other and got along well. We also knew the African-Americans who were active in the African-American cultural center. We all formed a pretty tight group, actually.

Sophomore year was an odd year for me. My roommate and closest friend left midway through the year because that "place" was "killing" him. But I had a couple of really good friends, Latinos, from the freshman class. During junior year I became much more active in the day to day life of my residential college. One of the football players, a senior, and I had been in a couple of classes together my freshman year. In the dining hall he would call me over, and I would go and sit with him and his friends. We used to hold

court during meals. I started to hang out with them, and, once football season was over, every Friday became a big party day in their room. These were white guys, but there was an African-American guy that I am really close to still. He and I would watch sports together, and I met a lot of his friends through him. By junior year, I was definitely steady in Pearson, my residential college. I had my crew, and I loved it.

While there was much for Michael to learn from non-academic life, he believed that he had much to contribute to the informal curriculum on the subject of valuing diversity. It is important to note that the impact of experiences outside the college classroom upon Michael's issues of identity may have been compounded by other factors stemming from family and home and relating specifically to his status as a first-generation college student. This was true of many other participants in the study and should not be taken as an indication that other such issues did not exist.

For Florence, the informal curriculum proved crucial to her awakening identity as a Native American. Florence had grown up on a reservation, but her family had "protected" her by keeping her ignorant of her people's traditional ways:

As if the magic of the church were not potent enough to banish Indian beliefs, somewhere along the line somebody gave me the message -- I may have been sitting in the Medina Baptist Church at the time -- that there were two kinds of Indians, the good ones who were Christians and the bad ones who practiced the traditional ways. Those of us who had converted to Christianity were assured somehow that our people who practiced traditional ways were pagans. Very early in my life I got the message that I must not associate with the pagans and that separation from them was not merely necessary but was also the Christian thing to do. Not surprisingly, I do not recall having any friends who followed the traditional ways when I was growing up. I may have had a few acquaintances at school who were from that group, but I was friends with none of them, and being a good Indian, I knew and was interested in nothing of substance about my culture.

Florence explained that the wealth of information that she learned from her Native

American peers at college became an invaluable and personalized part of her curriculum. As one with practically no knowledge of the history and traditions of Native American people, hearing the personal histories of her college friends gave Florence an immediate base of information about herself, her history, and the many nations of her people. Florence pointed out that life outside the college classroom “enriched and corroborated” what she was learning through the formal curriculum. As she put it:

NAES (Native American Educational Services, a Native American college with a campus in Chicago) was a focal field in my life for my becoming aware of other Indian nations, cultures, and traditions. At NAES, I would hear about the boarding schools in the States and in Canada. Someone said the children would go in those boarding schools innocent and pure of heart and would leave broken in spirit. I could reach out and touch my best friend, Joan Takahara, who had gone to a boarding school when she was four years old. She could share with me how she became very ill. It seems to her to have been around Christmas time. People in charge of the school put her in a room that was dark, and it seems to her that she was still there by Easter. By then she was all drawn up and could hardly move. And a priest came in and bodily picked her up and moved her from that place. These kinds of exposures to real life experiences that people had and that are part of our history became part of my curriculum when I was in college. The knowledge that I received from my colleagues was as great as -- it enriched and corroborated -- what I learned in the classroom.

I never went to a powwow when I was on the reserve in Canada. We were separate from the people who practiced the traditional ways. When I was in college, I learned about taking part in powwows and eventually thinking, “I’ll be darned! That’s the grass dance! I know that! Heavenly days! I know this! I know that!” It was quite a springboard for me just to begin to realize that in spite of the fact that Native Americans were torn from our reserves in some cases. . . Native Americans were torn from their families but were still able to maintain our link, our strong spiritual link, to the traditional ways.

Also important to Florence was the bonding that took place among the students. She described their relationship as almost like a family. The students had much in common, as

many were of nontraditional age, were divorced, had children, and were the heads of their households. Through the informal curriculum, Florence gained the opportunity to immerse herself further into Native American culture by attending traditional events with her peers. She was absolutely intent on learning all that she could about herself and her people and became a virtual sponge, absorbing everything that she could and building community with her acquaintances in the process. "I've been trying to learn what I can about the traditional ways," she told me. "In terms of learning about Native American people, I have no time to lose because during so much of my life, I learned practically nothing."

For many of this study's participants, the informal curriculum provided opportunities for affirmation and validation through bonding with the faculty. For example, because Velma had worked for a year and a half before going to college, she saw herself technically as an older student and felt somewhat removed at first from her classmates. But she made friends with an English professor who welcomed her in her office for informal talks. Another professor actually visited Velma in her dorm room, sat on the floor with her, and through a discourse of equals, enhanced Velma's sense of self and affirmed her worth as a member of the college community. When Velma first travelled by plane, her English professor gave her spending money because she knew that Velma was almost completely without funds. Later, when Velma was able to pay her back, the professor would not accept the repayment. She asked Velma to do the same for someone else someday. Velma told me that she lives by that credo.

Several of the participants spoke of their connections with others through extra curricular involvements as helpful in giving them confidence and in establishing an identity for

themselves on the college campus. Theresa became president of the Spanish language National Honor Society as a result of a heightened self image, which improved her self-concept even more. Larry became active in school politics when he was in law school. He had been shy as a child, but as vice-president of the Student Bar Association, he had to talk. His peers had pushed him into the role, but he found that he had an affinity for all the social and political duties that the position demanded. Nancy was active in the NAACP and worked on voter registration. Others participated in various activities that enriched their lives and forged bridges between themselves and others.

Sometimes the participants' connections with others took on the flavor of rebellion. Accustomed to the excitement of life in the city, Nancy was caught in a flood of lights as she crawled back in the dorm through a window at 10:30 p. m. from an evening of small town fun and was actually brought to trial by the university senate. Jim left Berkeley during the Vietnam War demonstrations of the 1960s because the political unrest was too disruptive to his studies. He spent a couple of weekends locked up on a concrete slab in Sacramento where the authorities would take Berkeley students who were simply walking home from classes on Friday afternoons. Sometimes his classes were held on Haight Ashbury. The Berkeley experience introduced him to some of the students who were very involved in the anti-war demonstrations and with whom he later connected at the hippie commune, The Farm. Ray played an active role in the 1960s Civil Rights demonstrations in the south. He spoke with me about the sense of community and the seriousness of purpose that were part of his involvement:

Everyone I knew was involved to some degree in the Civil Rights Movement.

We used to demonstrate in front of segregated establishments such as lunch counters and movie houses. Hundreds of nicely turned out college students would approach the ticket booth at movie theatres and ask for a ticket. The students were instructed always to line up and approach in pairs. Their requests to purchase a ticket were always refused unless I or a white-looking black were the ones asking. We would buy a ticket, go in, stay a little while, and come out and join the line again. The second time we approached the same attendant, we would be refused. We wanted to show that skin color can fool anyone foolish enough to make decisions based upon it. Perhaps more important, we wanted to show that sharing a theatre with someone who is black poses no harm, as a result of that person's blackness, to anyone in the theatre. And we also wanted to show -- and this may be the most important lesson of all -- that we weren't tired and we would keep coming back until justice was served.

How did the students make time for learning from the informal curriculum?

Everything in their lives was arranged around their classes, the top priority within the formal curriculum. As the top priority in the informal curriculum, work was coordinated with classes before time was allotted for any other activity. More pervasive than any other pattern in the out of classroom experiences of the participants, work gained supremacy by being absolutely necessary to the financial and, by extension, academic survival of most students in the study. Jim learned carpentry and how to lay linoleum and carpet, skills that he later used to help support his family. Theresa was a research and teaching assistant which enabled her to help other students learn to navigate the world of the university. Florence was a development officer which provided her with work experience in the area that she was seeking her degree. All of the participants worked, and, interestingly, most reported that their work experiences were important far beyond providing them with badly needed money. Larry worked to earn extra money for flying and violin lessons. Later he worked from six until nine in the mornings as a flight instructor before going to his job as an intern in patent law at Westinghouse. Velma

learned from working for Upward Bound that she could be a teacher and a leader. Mary's work as a nanny enabled her to live with educated, kind, financially secure people who changed her life by ushering her into another world. Bob worked at many jobs, sometimes three or four at a time. He recalled one job that was especially significant:

In my second semester at the community college, I had an instructor who just didn't think I was going to make it as an artist. I would think, "Maybe he's right!" But there was a woman whose daughter I had gone out with in high school, and she was an artist. She said, "Come over and I'll teach you how to paint." She had these very generic looking clown paintings. I would sit with her and she sort of mentored me. She said, "Well, if you're gonna paint these things, you're gonna enter 'em in shows and you're gonna sell 'em." She took me around Chicago to all these places where she had her paintings hanging on the walls of these restaurants. And she mounted my stuff on the walls! She'd say, "Get all these framed up!" I didn't even know *how* to paint. I'd stick the brush in the tube of paint. I didn't even know you put paint out on something. She showed me how to do it. And she said, "If you're gonna do it, you're gonna make a living off of it." I remember we went into some real divey bars and places like that, and she'd hang my paintings on the walls, and her stuff was down there. I started selling paintings, and that's what I really put myself through school with. I did art fairs. That was almost like being a street peddler. If you talked to people and asked if they'd do art fairs, they'd say, "Well, then you'd be seen as no good. You can't be serious about your work if you're doing art fairs."

I had that problem all the way through graduate school. I had to do it. I had no other choice because that was the only way I was going to make it through school. When I finished graduate school, I went to the college art association, and there weren't any jobs at all. I bought my house at that time off the money I had made off my paintings, and I paid it off in four years.

Another example of academic discipline related work was provided by Gaoke. When he came to graduate school at an American university, Gaoke needed to find work to support himself, and on a professor's suggestion, he was given a position as a teaching assistant in the English department on three day's notice. He did not understand English as spoken by the students, especially when they used slang. His courses were hard, especially literary criticism.

He had not studied Freudianism. He had not read deconstructionists such as Derrida and had no concept of why “a center is not a center.” He never went to bed that whole year before midnight and never got up later than 7:00 a.m. He ate dinner at 12:00 midnight. Every Sunday he would cook a week’s supply of food and put it in the freezer. He would prepare chicken legs and snow peas and would augment this fare with the eastern noodles that you simply put in hot water. His wife and young son were in China. When he got to see them again after two years, his son had forgotten him.

Yet, Gaoke realized that as the third person in the history of his village in China to go to college, he was extremely lucky. He told me that many of his friends had gotten too deeply involved in the Cultural Revolution and their lives had been wasted. In their zeal to follow Chairman Mao, they had ended up killing people. Gaoke recalled an extremely intelligent friend who had become a company leader prior to being imprisoned and forced to spend all his waking hours writing a self-criticism. His imprisonment had been the result of false accusations that he was responsible for the deaths of many people. Day in and day out he was forced to write the lies that comprised his self-criticism. One day he decided that he would not do it anymore, and he took the sharp pointed pen and gouged it in his eyes. The inky piercings blinded him.

As was true of many other participants in this study, Gaoke felt that a gift of great worth was the chance to work in order to earn college degrees and to change for generations the educational, social, and economic status of his family. Even with his singular voice and his very specific experience, he encapsulated the spirit with which most of the participants embraced both their coursework and their jobs. His words seemed to say for all of them,

“This is why we worked and why we studied”:

I got the chance to compete at college, and I knew I could, but I sometimes felt it was unfair that I was chosen over my colleagues to sit for an exam. I owe something to them and to my family. My older brother didn't have my chances. My mother was very sickly, and he had to miss a lot of school to go to the city and stay in the hospital with her. My parents were poor, too poor even to come to my graduation, and I was off working, teaching, during that time anyway. My classmates at college would talk about their families and how well they were doing, and I knew that my family was not doing well. So I thought that maybe I'm the person to change things for my family.

Because I had so little money, I felt pressure from other students when they wanted me to go to town, to the parks, to have something to eat like pot stickers or something. I didn't have money to do these things. I would try to avoid going with them. Now, I think staying behind all the time was good because all I could do was study. I look back now and I can say that I did better because I was studying. Of the eighteen students in my class, I was the best.

Life outside the classroom provided the participants in this study with important experiences in the discovery of self and others through various types of work and other avenues of the informal curriculum. Crucial to their senses of belonging, these experiences formed rich extensions to the formal curriculum and platforms for the developing social consciousnesses among these first-generation college students. Almost universally, the marks of the informal curriculum on the participants were indelible, figuring prominently in how they would both work and play long after their college days had passed. In most cases, the interviewees reported that the benefits of learning from the informal curriculum abetted their classroom experiences, the subject of the following section.

The Professor as Change Agent

Sometimes my professors did other things that I found kind of life changing. I remember one time Syracuse had a workshop up in Blue Mountain Lake, above Utica. The whole workshop was on aesthetic ambiguities. . . . These professors somehow gave me a lot more freedom to experiment. Using glass in my paintings is the result of one of my experiments. I try to do just pure experimentation at least six to eight weeks a year. Much of that practice came from my experience at the Syracuse workshops.

Jim

The single most important measure of whether students are successful in college is whether they are successful in the classroom. Far more important than how well they have adjusted, what they have learned, or what they can prove they know, the grades that students achieve symbolize the degree to which they are academically successful. Since first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are almost universally afraid of failure, it is easy to imagine the trepidation with which many of this study's participants mounted the unrelenting scales of competition in the college classroom.

Many had personally experienced reasons to be afraid. Gaining access to college had been an enormous battle. Reconciling the culture of home with the new culture of college had severely tested their mettle. Establishing themselves in the society of the college had at times seemed unattainable. And since most of these factors were not over and done with in linear fashion, their tectonic jostling might have rattled the equilibrium of the Sphinx. Needless to say, the participants in this study were not Sphinxes. Yet, they all earned bachelor's degrees, and some even earned graduate and professional degrees.

The individuals interviewed for this study reported a variety of college classroom experiences, both good and bad, which presented strong evidence that specific variables positively influenced their college success. Factors such as the intellectual and personal

connection between professors and students, dialogical teaching, professors' transformative power, and the intentionality of the students themselves were all stressed as instrumental in the success of these first-generation college students.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the positive effect of intellectual as well as personal connections that professors were able to establish with this study's participants. For these students, interacting with their professors, especially in small classes, transcended the classroom experience to form the basis for friendship long after the classes were over. Ken spoke about the excitement of discovering like-minded individuals among his professors who presented, fully enfolded, the skeletons that were his emerging ideas:

Most of my classes were seminars in philosophy with nine people in them. I got to know my teachers well. We were welcomed in our teachers' houses. Two years ago, another philosophy instructor and I went to hear one of my professors from William and Mary speak at Roosevelt. He took us out for breakfast. After all those years, the relationships don't break down. They are just wonderful people, wonderful teachers who did new and different things for me. All of a sudden, here were people who thought the way I did, who were putting forth in the classroom the same ideas I was beginning to develop on my own. The world just kept expanding.

I also had a wonderful professor, David Jenkins, who taught me William Butler Yeats. He was an eccentric bachelor who, not being married, had lots of time for students. I would be sitting there eating ice cream, and he'd say, "Hey, come on, I'm going to the airport. Come along for the ride." He had an old Austin that he could barely fit in. He was this great big lanky man who helped us to uncover the genius and beauty of Yeats' work. William and Mary was just a wonderful experience because of the professors. I couldn't have chosen a better school for me at the time.

Ken's example, which is representative of many others in the interviews, stresses the impact of professors who help their students to stretch intellectually but also to develop zones of comfort within the college milieu. Affirmation, validation, enfranchisement, a sense of

belonging, and excellence in education are only a few of the benefits for students that most of the interviewees attributed to professors who made genuine connections with them both as students and as individuals.

Michael provided another example of the involved professor's contribution to the academic success of an interviewee. He spoke of a tough professor at Yale who awakened his identity as a Puerto Rican, underscored the importance of social and civic responsibility, urged the students toward moral agency, and assessed them in a meticulously fair way:

What really helped to shape me from those years was a professor I had during my freshman year. . . . He was vicious! We had these monstrous case books, and we had to read five hundred pages a week for our once a week seminar. You would come into class and Manuel would start firing questions at you, left and right, and you wouldn't know where he was going to go next. And those were specific little questions, so you had to have done the reading. I loved that class! It was hell . . . but we loved it! The entire course was based on the status of Puerto Rico which had developed over time. That Manuel was Puerto Rican made all the difference in the world in terms of his teaching the course. . . . one of the first things that we did was read an article he had written on the subject. We had three very large case books of decisions and opinions Then Manuel came back my junior year and taught another course. Most of us in the class had taken his first offering . . . The majority of the students were Latinos. . . . because of the subject matter.

But Manuel had a lot more than subject matter to offer He taught us that there is a definite sense of rightness and that the responsibility to make it happen lies with us. He said that Puerto Ricans comprise 2 percent or less of the Latino population and that we had to make sure we figured out what to do and that we did it well. I learned a lot from Manuel; I learned a ton from him. More important than what I learned academically, Manuel fostered my learning about my cultural identity, who I am as a person, and who I want to be. I am very grateful for Manuel's example. . . . I still have a copy of the recommendation that Manuel wrote for me. . . . He worked us hard, and he . . . praised the brilliance that he saw in us.

From both Michael's and Ken's examples, there is a clear message that professors who can offer common ground on which they and their students can meet intellectually are,

in effect, extending a bridge to their students, meeting them on the expanse, and engaging them intellectually and perhaps in countless other positive ways. From his professor's influence, Michael grew academically, politically, and personally. Diane, in much the same vein, not only grew academically in a creative writing class, but also emotionally as she came to understand and value the respectful critiques of Cyrus Colter, a famous author and professor who compelled her to strive for excellence:

He said to me, "I think you're more like Toni Morrison. You're not good with plotting, but your descriptions are quite vivid. You may want to rethink some of these things." He was really hard on me. I got a B. I thought I was going to get a C. He gave me an incomplete at first so I could finish the piece I was working on. Then he wrote me this long, two pages of comments on my story. He filled two pages of legal paper. Those comments are one of my pride and joys. It amazed me that he would give me that kind of attention. There was the disappointment, though, that he didn't really like my writing the way he did some people's.

He let me know that I could take criticism and not dissolve. Being in class sometimes felt like a totem pole deal where other students were climbing all over you to make their work look better. He was tough! Egos would fly! People would clash! It was a wonderful experience.

Just as the effectiveness of a professor at connecting with and engaging his students was reiterated in most of the case histories, their pedagogical styles were also important to the interviewees as contributors to their academic success. Diane emphasized the power of dialogical teaching on her survival in academia by first telling me about the conditions under which she had previously defected from the isolation and emptiness of college life. "I didn't know what I could be. I was very much lost. The university subtracted from me. There was no closeness. By the time I left, I had no idea what I *could* do."

This was a bleak and different vantage point from which Diane contemplated her possibilities. She had believed that she could achieve whatever she wanted to achieve until she entered the “real world of higher education.” She entered the university as an English major, but as an African-American, she quickly discovered that she was an anomaly in the department. She had graduated from Lundbloom Technical High School on the south side of Chicago where most of the students were of color. But in courses such as Shakespeare or Milton’s *Paradise Lost* at the university, she was the only black person and found herself socially isolated on the campus. Her dreams of becoming a teacher or writer were replaced as her point of focus by her sudden concern with social status and racial identity. As the only black in the classroom and as one who had no connections with others on the campus, she felt that she had to prove herself. She told me that she tried to make sure that she had read every extra assignment so that she would be ready in the classroom, but the coldness and alienation consumed her confidence, and once she was in class, she could not speak. She described sitting in huge lecture halls with five hundred other students while trying to understand history and finding the small group sessions with teaching assistants inadequate to foster real communication. She told me that no white student ever tried to cross the divide between them, and she had no student support system because she never made friends with any one. So one day, after she had been on the campus for a year and a half, she asked herself, “Why am I here?” Not finding a substantive answer, she dropped out.

When Diane resumed her college career at Columbia College, the structure of the classroom and the dialogic teaching style of her professors proved crucial to the transformation that she experienced. As she told me:

I was really happy in these classes. . . . We sat in a room with people and actually looked at them. We sat in a circle. The teacher . . . was relaxed . . . and accessible, which was very strange. Connections with students were much easier to make. Classes were small, and sometimes the same people would be in different classes. I was delighted by that. It really helped me.

I guess I decided I had a voice at Columbia because I wanted to become a writer and I didn't like having the professors indicate that women didn't matter because we weren't being taught at Harvard or being tested on the GRE (Graduate Record Examination). I thought that belittled me as well as the great writers like Toni Morrison. . . . I still have a hard time defending myself, but when other people are affected, I can leap, as they say, to the fore.

I could not have attained my voice at U of I (the University of Illinois). At Columbia, the professors helped to create an atmosphere that was conducive to change. The atmosphere made me feel free enough to express myself in class, and my views were validated by students and faculty. At U of I, I felt very small, but at Columbia I could talk to and be friends with faculty and peers. I was able to value myself as a person and as a student. I could say, "I don't like this; I don't think this is fair."

Professors were facilitators. They involved all of us, and it was so nice to be taken seriously and to have people say that your ideas were good. Both U of I and Columbia were commuter schools, so that wasn't the difference. Even if your professors didn't like what you had to say, at Columbia you still had a forum from which to say it. You weren't in those huge lecture halls where the people who were already outspoken sat at the front with their hands raised, and the shy rushed to the back, and nobody ever tried to get them to integrate.

My experience at Columbia shows the power of professors to help a student become who that student really is. If you are too quiet, then . . . you are not talking about those issues that are of real concern to you or recognizing that people value the contributions that you make when you talk. In a setting where you are really encouraged to do that, what happens is that you begin to become who you really are.

Another quality that greatly contributed to the college success of many of the study's participants was the power of professors to aid in transforming their students. Many of the participants talked about the professors who changed their lives by being the role models

whom they emulated in their professional lives. Theresa, a teacher, provided one example of the transformative power of a professor whose methodologies are recreated in her former student's classroom every day :

My teacher who sort of saved me taught Latin American Culture and Spanish, her third language. I modeled my classroom after hers because I liked the way she set up the classroom so much. I thought it gave people who didn't know how to do very well in all areas a chance to get credit for the hard work that they were successful at doing. She divided the points you could earn in class into 50 percent for exams, 20 percent for quizzes, 20 percent for homework, and 5 percent each for attendance and participation. If you weren't great at taking exams, you could do well in the other areas and perhaps build your confidence. If you had confidence, you could do better on exams. I didn't always test well, but in small chunks and in projects, I would pour my heart into everything I did. On the big exams, I didn't know how to focus because I didn't have the study skills, I think. I would still get a decent grade in her class even if I didn't test up to what my potential was. She gave me credit for all the things that I did well. I really liked that. I thought that I might have many students like me with test anxiety, and they might not make it on the tests and would just feel stupid when they're really not. I wanted to give them a chance. My professor was the biggest person in my life.

While one might correctly expect that participants who are themselves teachers would model in their work exemplary instructors from their days as students, it also appeared true of participants in other fields. Carmen, who holds an accounting degree and works for a social service organization, put to excellent use the teachings of her English professor from her freshman year at DePaul:

She always allowed us to write about something personal. She thought people were most effective when they wrote about personal things. She felt that you are going to catch the reader's interest with personal writing because the reader wants to know about you. It is so true. . . . when I have to do an annual report, when I have to do a write-up for the newspaper, for funders, I always attach a case history about one of our clients. It gives them a flavor of the kinds of things we do. . . . It has what the client's gone through and how we were able to help. Even when board members or others come out to visit, I take them out to see clients and they can see firsthand how we use the

money -- "This is who we lent it to, and this is what the person has done."

In addition to those referenced in the preceeding excerpts from the interviewees' stories, many other professors whom the participants encountered in the classroom were invaluable agents of positive change in their students' lives. In fact, some of the participants, such as Theresa, credit one or more of their professors with being the single most significant factor in surviving their college experience. Nancy gave an account of how her professors' presentations and the courses of study were so dynamic and interesting that she became intellectually involved in the classroom against her will. She explained that at the time she had never, ever taken herself seriously as a student. In her background, there were certain behaviors that were off limits for girls, and becoming intellectually involved with ideas was one of them. Anticipating my suspicion that she had pretended not to be intellectually involved, Nancy explained that as a product of her upbringing, she had no perception of herself at the time as a very intelligent woman who was pretending to be less astute. Rather, she had thought that she was smart enough to get her degree but really not very smart and that she should not bring attention to her intellect. She had been afraid that if she were seen as an intellectual threat or challenge to anyone, she would increase her chances of making a fool of herself. She provided a clear illustration of a positive self-concept that is "in the closet," held back even from her own consciousness by the conventions of her background.

Nancy stated:

I pretended that I wasn't really interested, that I just wanted to get the degree. But that wasn't really true. I was fascinated by the courses and the work that I was reading and doing, but somehow I couldn't freely admit to that. I remember knowing one woman who was a colleague of my husband -- already in graduate school -- who took herself seriously and got a TA. She was the

only woman I knew who had one. They didn't give them out to women or to blacks. They only went to white guys. I kind of disapproved of her. There was something very masculine about her. I thought at the time, "Who is she?"

Professors who connected with and engaged Nancy in the classroom may have generated her metamorphosis from non-serious student to serious scholar. By contrast, Mary talked about the negative effect of a professor whose approach to teaching was without connection with or engagement of his students. In fact, the professor was presented as an extinguisher of enthusiasm for a subject rather than the involved instructor that Mary needed:

I had trouble in math class. The teacher was very knowledgeable; he had written a math book. Nothing was wrong with his knowledge base or his ability to do math. But his teaching style and my learning style did not match. He'd tell me answers but wouldn't show me the process. He'd stand there and lecture, but that wasn't what I needed When the teachers were involved with the material and let us have a lot of practical or hands on experience, I learned better. I would talk to other students to see if I could learn from them. I got a "D" from that math class, and I had loved math before. My grade wasn't because I couldn't understand math. I just didn't get the help that I needed from that teacher.

Mary felt that by using exclusively the straight lecture mode and by failing to demonstrate the process of solving math problems, the professor had failed at his job. The cost to Mary was not only an unsatisfactory grade but also the loss of a subject -- since it had been rendered incomprehensible by her professor -- that she had loved. When Mary could not get the help that she needed from the institution, she sought help from her peers, a strategy that was often employed by interviewees across the case studies. Even when such interventions did not meet with the desired degree of academic success, most of the participants were able to analyze their circumstances and to determine where the real cause of the problem lay. By objective isolation of the problem's cause, the participants could devise

a realistic battle plan to achieve a solution. In Mary's case, by ascertaining that the cause of the problem was external to herself and that it rightly fell under the province of the professor, Mary was spared the lowered self-esteem of thinking the "D" in math meant there was something wrong with her. Analysis enhanced Mary's resilience, a causality repeatedly demonstrated in the stories of many of the study's participants.

Such intentionality worked in similar fashion for Carmen who told me about a professor who did not use a dialogical or student centered approach to teaching. Carmen had to take his class three times:

I had to take a cost accounting class three times because my professor was just a total jerk. He was very cold. He presented the material very quickly. He didn't have "any time to tutor you. You either get it or you don't. It isn't difficult stuff." He knew I had taken the class twice, and I went to him and said, "I'm graduating. I've taken this class twice. . . . Please cut me some slack." And twice he gave me a D. I'm not the first person he did that to. Even if I took it in the day time, he was still the only professor teaching it. When I enrolled in the class the third time, it was a TBA [to be announced] and I had no idea it would be him. I said, "I'm not dropping." He knew it was my third time and I was stuck. He did other women the same way he did me. He doesn't teach there any more. He didn't even have tenure. . . . Even if you said, "Can you repeat that, please?" he'd say, "Well, we don't have time for that right now. We're gonna move on to . . . and if you have questions, you can ask me later." And I needed the question answered *before* we went on.

He was very intimidating. You were afraid to ask questions because he'd already told you he didn't have time for that. How did he expect us to go on to the next material if we couldn't grasp the first? Once I asked, "What's the sense of going on if we don't know how to calculate *this* to insert *this* in this cost analysis?" He said, "You can save your remarks for someone who cares or wants to listen to them." Then I was fuming because I was paying for the class and wasn't getting anything out of it. It was humiliating to have to go to him after class and ask for his help.

The third time I took the class, I could have taught it for him. . . . I was successful because it was the only class I was taking. I had notes from the first and second times I had taken it. I had done all my work the first two

times, but the fact that I knew what to expect and what types of tests he gave and the repetition made it doable. There was *no one* I could talk to about how that professor was. They were just gonna say, "You're taking cost accounting," like I was *expected* to fail. I was asking myself what was wrong with me that I couldn't grasp cost.

According to Carmen, that she was a woman in the predominately male accounting department was the major reason the cost accounting professor treated her and other women with such disdain. Her problem with the accounting professor, she indicated, was certainly not that the subject was difficult. To the contrary, it was that he had discouraged communication and understanding to the point that she just did not understand the necessary procedures. "If you have to work with formulas and you've no idea how he's getting this particular number," Carmen asked rhetorically, "how are you going to plug it in?"

As was true of Mary, Carmen analyzed her situation and found that the professor's lack of connection with his female students and his unwillingness or inability to use a more student-centered, hands-on approach to teaching were major barriers to her success. In spite of her professor, her own powers of analysis and intentionality, qualities displayed repeatedly by the study's participants in academic as well as in other settings, eventually resulted in her success. Two successive "D's" had made Carmen doubt herself, but by analyzing her predicament and isolating the reasons for her unsatisfactory grades, she had been able to identify and execute a solution. At the same time, by objectively placing the blame for her situation squarely upon the shoulders of her professor, she had been able to retrieve her sense of worth.

Most of the participants in the study credit outstanding college professors with enhancing their academic success by generating intellectual and personal connections with

their students, involving the students in the learning process through use of student-centered or dialogical instructional approaches, and transforming students by means of illustrious example. Augmented by the students' own intentionality, these professorial qualities propelled the interviewees in this study much closer to their educational goal of college graduate.

CHAPTER X

ACTIVISM: A SAMPLER

You have to pay your dues. You have to pay back. I've always felt that I have been given this great opportunity and I owe somebody. . . . I think it's this amorphous, universal kind of thing that I have this good life that's been given to me. I don't think it was a person that gave it to me, but it was fortune. I had good fortune. Therefore, I should pay back.

Nancy

Since one of the questions that guided my research concerned the impact of the participants' previous experiences on their roles as social or educational activists, I expected to find information in the life stories that would relate directly to the participants' activist lives after college. What I did not anticipate, however, was a common finding across the cases between the participants' issues of identity and their contributions as activists. The finding seems to be highly significant in every case except one, where it merely seems to be less significant. In essence, the activist efforts of all of the participants address either directly or indirectly the problems, solutions, and related issues incorporated in their own self-concepts.

More specifically, I set out to identify experiences in the participants' lives, both prior to and during college, which had an impact on their academic success in college. In conjunction with isolating those experiences, I sought to discover their imprint on the participants' decisions to become educational or social activists, as well as how those experiences affected the ways in which the participants lived their lives and influenced others as agents of change. Glimpses at the participants' activist endeavors shed some light on the

effects of their transformations on themselves and on others.

With these ideas in mind, I first profile in this chapter a few of these activists by providing brief biographical sketches of them and allowing them to describe their activism in their own words. Next, I identify themes that were both common across the interviews and germane to the participants' activism. Those themes reveal the influence of pre-college and college experiences on the participants' decisions to become activists and on the forms that their activism has taken.

Engaging Activism: Profiles of Six First-Generation College Graduates

Larry

My intent was to conduct all of the interviews for this study more or less on the participants' home turf, but I had a problem with my schedule and wound up interviewing Larry in Chicago. He was coming to Chicago for a convention and, being aware of my scheduling difficulty, offered to be available to me for a few hours during his Chicago stay. This helpful gesture, I learned from secondary interviewees, was typical behavior for Larry, a graduate of the University of Michigan and Georgetown University School of Law, who practices law in Washington, D. C. He was happy to help me with my research and to save me the cost of a plane ticket and a lot of time.

From the blazing heat of a late summer day in Chicago, I entered the cavernous lobby of the hotel where I was to meet Larry. There were hundreds of people, mostly African-Americans, who seemed to be relaxing over drinks, making dinner plans, meeting old and new

acquaintances, and discussing the events of the day. They were impeccably dressed in expensive business suits, impervious in air conditioned comfort to the sweltering heat outside. They were lawyers in attendance at the National Convention of the National Bar Association, and Larry had delivered one of the day's speeches. I remember thinking at the time that every black kid in Chicago would profit in self-esteem if they could just look at this crowd, many of whom would symbolize the kids' own potential, and visualize what they could become under certain conditions. As I made my way to meet Larry, I thought about how different from these posh surroundings his beginnings, and my own, had been.

Larry was born in 1948 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His parents had relocated there, his father by way of Chicago from a hard life as a sharecropper in Alabama. His mother had been born in Arkansas. During his childhood, Larry had been impressed by the stories his father told him about teaching himself to read and write during the 1930s; about working for ten cents an hour in a factory and living in a rooming house where he paid \$1.55 a week for his room and dinner; about the struggle of blacks in the south and how the inequities there had motivated him to leave. He had gone to Muskegon to work in the machine shop or the glass factory or the aluminum factory for Chrysler's Army Tank Division. He taught Larry, the second of four children, many lessons including "the value of a penny, a dime, a dollar, how that value fluctuates with the times, and how the time when you could get a good job without an education was in the past."

When Larry was a kid attending the Grand Rapids Public Schools, he was bounced back and forth between his regular classroom and the special education classroom because he stammered when he talked and was viewed by his teacher as having a learning problem.

This view was not altered by his keen interest in mathematics or his ability to solve math problems rapidly and without use of pencil and paper. Larry himself determined as a teenager that he had been afraid to speak because he had been insecure in what he knew. As he grew in confidence by observing that he “could deal with whatever people put in front of him,” the stammering slowly went away. His interests expanded to science and art. He set up a chemistry laboratory in an unused kitchen at home and won an art scholarship for freehand drawing when he was sixteen. He decided to go to engineering school, however, and relegated sketching to a past time for twenty years.

Larry went to engineering school because he wanted to deal with gadgets and objects rather than with people. In engineering, he did not have to talk to anybody. He loved to create contraptions, and he was good at it. But he began looking at people who were fifteen to twenty years ahead of him, and they were not what he wanted to be in fifteen or twenty years. So by his senior year of undergraduate school, Larry was certain that he did not want to become an engineer. He went to law school instead.

“How the hell did someone like you end up in law school? You never did like to talk!” his former roommate from undergraduate school asked him. It was an important question. This former engineer who did not like to talk has held positions at several prestigious law firms, the latest of which is a billion dollar a year operation that he heads. “I can learn to talk just like you did,” Larry told his former roommate, evincing an intentionality that is prevalent throughout the case histories. “I had a problem with it,” he told me, referring to law school. But active participation in school politics forced him to talk, and he discovered a proclivity for talking and an enjoyment of it.

Larry also discovered luck. With no money for an apartment in Washington during his graduate school days, he lived with his father in Baltimore and commuted by train to his classes at Georgetown. Within the first three weeks of law school, he happened to sit down on the train by a man who was a law student at night at the University of Baltimore and a Westinghouse employee by day. He told Larry of a job opening at Westinghouse and three days later, Larry was hired. His education would be paid for by Westinghouse, and he would have a job with the company after graduation. He went into private practice after graduation, however, because the job with Westinghouse would have required his living in Pittsburgh. Neither Larry nor anyone else in the study stayed in jobs or locales after graduation from college if they believed that staying would not make them happy. "I just didn't like the area," Larry said of Pittsburgh, "so I left the company. I went into private practice with no clients, no job, no money, no nothing. . . . I starved for six months."

Larry has not "starved" since that time. He is a very successful lawyer, a social activist, and the owner of an art gallery. And in agreement with everyone in the study, he stated that while the nature of human beings is to want more, he, personally, can live without it:

I could have a Jaguar, a Rolls-Royce, a fancy airplane, but I'd just as soon provide a facility for the artists and do some electronics stuff. I put one of my artists through college. He came to me from prison, out of Ohio. Five years ago, I had more time than I do now to talk to artists that come to the gallery about their work and about themselves personally. He came and showed me his work when he'd been out of prison around two months. He still had post-prison syndrome, and was trying to find a niche in life again. He needed help. He was self-taught as an artist while in prison. I said I thought maybe he could make something out of himself as an artist and that I would finance it. He had gone to Howard University for maybe a year. He killed another student. Then he spent twelve years in prison.

At my suggestion, he took a couple of courses at the Corcoran Museum during the summer and passed them with flying colors. Then he went to Howard, and I spent \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year for four years to finance his college education. Last year he graduated, and he is now in graduate school at Wayne State studying art. We had a couple of art shows when we had his art work exhibited, and a number of his family came. I suspect he wanted to show them he was making it. We sold his work and he got money for it. His folks came and looked at his work, but I think they were not ready to accept him. Their vibes were apparent. I think he killed someone in the heat of passion over a woman.

When he was in school, he would come and talk to me about some of the problems that he had with the other students. He was ten years older than they were, and the story was out that he was an ex-con. People whispered about him. He developed a complex over it after a while, but he stuck it out and now he's out of the environment.

During the eighties I graduated in income beyond the real struggling phase, and I had more time to appreciate art and culture. And I also had time to understand and appreciate the struggle of black people and the need to preserve their ways of life and the culture, beliefs, spirits, and principles by which they have lived. My motivation was fortified by the motivation of institutional America not to recognize it. So it was a reactive force -- "Okay, you asshole, you don't like it, so here's more of it" -- not directed to any one individual, but to America as a whole. I'd had some experiences myself with denial, discrimination, unfairness. It all added up over forty years of my life, and I said, "You're going to do something about this!" I also felt the need to provide guidance and role models to young people in the arts. . . .

No art gallery makes money, but it gives me the chance to present an element of society that represents us truly, many of whom were denied access elsewhere. Then I designed the screen savers to get the work out there of significant artists that would make statements and influence us subliminally. I wanted to get away from the water melon eating, cotton picking, biscuit eating, gravy sopping image that people have had of us and show that we are about other things. We have art from at least fifty countries. My interest is to have global representation of mostly black people. I've pursued black Americans. I started in D.C., moved to Memphis, Atlanta, Florida, California, Montreal, Toronto, Nova Scotia. Then south to Brazil, the Caribbean. Then to Europe for black artists united there. Then I started going to Africa, and I met people there who are art dealers, representatives who brought their work into the gallery as well. Right now there are at least a couple hundred pieces from Africa and another couple hundred from other parts of the world. We

have black artists who are among the most respected in the world, and we keep the door open to emerging artists. I build relationships with artists, and then they let me have their work. Loads of school children, and others, can come through here and see what black art is about.

Jack

On a brisk autumn morning, I drove to the town where Jack's business sprawls on the banks of the Fox River. The old brick buildings are refurbished and beautiful, lending an aura of hope to the rest of the working class community. There is a park on Jack's property which is open to the town's residents for picnics and leisure. A graduate of the University of Illinois, Jack is the owner of an engineering company. Before our interview, he took me on a tour of the business, rushing to make sure I met everyone before they went to lunch. Everyone was over three hundred employees who appeared to love their boss and their work. I talked briefly with a number of them who praised Jack for his ingenuity, willingness to take risks, pride in their work, and compassion. He, in turn, praised them for almost those same qualities. "That beautiful machine shop," he said, "it's effectiveness, cleanliness, everything grew out of John's (an employee) creativity. He was given the initiative to make something work, and it did. People appreciate being treated like responsible people on the job."

Jack was born seventy-four years ago in Chicago. His paternal grandparents came from Germany where his grandfather fought in the War of 1870. His father was a very intelligent man who completed eighth grade in his native Chicago. As an adult, he ran a logging operation in Wisconsin before World War II. He told Jack about his involvement in facing down Communists at that time because they were trying to make people dissatisfied

with America. "They were members of the International Workers of the World, or Wobblies," Jack told me, "and they had a violent encounter with my father."

As politically concerned as his father had been, Jack spoke emphatically to me about the need for a good moral and economic plan for America. Seven years ago, he started a not-for-profit organization on the premises of his business with the objective of teaching people how to run for and get elected to office. A strong advocate for school vouchers, he explained that public school children, especially among the poor, are pawns of education's bureaucrats and do not become prepared educationally to help the country by helping themselves to become educated contributors to a morally and economically sound society. "The public schools are bringing up ninnies," he said. "You can't run a country with ninnies."

Jack's own education seems reflective of his views on, and now, activist work in, public education. When he was in elementary school, his parents tried to give him a Catholic school education, but he went back and forth between Catholic and public school because, with five children to feed and care for, his parents just could not afford the tuition even though it was negligible. The youngest of the five, when Jack started first grade, he was skipped right away from first to second because his sister had taught him the alphabet and a little bit of reading. When he went to Catholic school for third, fourth, and fifth grades, he was put back a year because his skills were so poor. Then the family moved and could not afford Catholic school anymore, so he went back to public school where they skipped him ahead again. He felt that he was not learning in the public school, but he discovered reading. There were books in the house that the older kids had in school. Jack read *Ivanhoe* when he was a little kid. He read *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Tale of Two*

Cities, and *The Book of Knowledge*, a one volume encyclopedia, from cover to cover when he was in grammar school. High school was grossly easy the first two years, and school was out at 12:15 in the afternoon. He developed a creative outlet, building and later designing gas model airplanes which probably got him interested in becoming an engineer. He started making and selling his own airplane kits. He told me that antique clubs still fly his prize winning plane, the Swoose, designed when he was at Oak Park High School where he received an excellent education in eleventh and twelfth grades.

Jack seemed convinced that in too many public elementary and secondary schools, education means money in the pockets of the adults with nothing much going to the kids. He stated that educational, social, and economic change must take place at the legislative level. While Jack explained that most of his activist work is conducted through his political organization, he has become a fervent advocate for public school choice in Chicago. He described his activism in this arena through the following example:

St. Elizabeth's is an entirely black Catholic school in Chicago with 410 students. It is a plain old building without graffiti and with contemporary cast off furniture. Most of the teachers are black, and there are a couple of nuns. It is in a tough neighborhood, right near the Robert Taylor Homes. The children, if you listen to popular opinion, are not supposed to be educable: yet, St. Elizabeth's is doing a fine job with them. When I first went there, I saw 410 kids who looked like happy little kids. They sat in orderly rows in classrooms sometimes; other times they sat in groups. They laughed at little things. They seemed free and easy. There was no rowdiness. And I learned that they graduate at close to the national average in spite of coming from the Robert Taylor Homes and from families that live in that area. They go on to high school, and a lot of them go on to college. Many of the black movers and shakers in Chicago come out of settings like that, and not from the public schools. Some are so natively intelligent that they could make it anywhere, but why should they have to? And there are a lot of kids who are really smart and haven't found themselves yet. There are kids who aren't as smart, won't join Mensa, maybe wouldn't profit from college. Who knows? But the usual

spread of talent is present in those kids from the area in and around the Robert Taylor Homes. And all of those kids deserve a good education. I've come to believe that you can make or break education in the first three grades. . . .

I became an advisor -- that's a fancy name for the guy who helps them get money because they do not have enough -- to St. Elizabeth's, and I went to the eighth grade graduation a year ago. The graduates were a bunch of kids who looked happy and like they knew what they were doing. The graduation came off with nothing that wasn't first class about it. This is success at a third of the cost per pupil in the public schools. At St. Elizabeth's it costs \$2,365 per pupil, and in Chicago it's around \$7,000. I asked this black man who is an advisor what percent of the students they put out for disruptive behavior. He looked puzzled and said, "I don't know. Not many." So I asked Sister Carol. She said in the last ten years they have expelled four students. They take anyone who comes unless they are severely disabled. Otherwise, they take them all. The public schools lose half of their students who vote with their feet.

I've been doing the St. Elizabeth's thing for six or seven years now. I get money from my business. The personal money that I make, I put back. I don't have a lot of cash on hand, and I don't have a lot of stock. But I live well. I'm a rich man. I've got freedom and all the things that I need. I give a few thousand to St. Elizabeth's every year, but what I do there is at best anecdotal. The majority of my money I put into the political process. That's the best way that I can think of to make sweeping changes to help students and families and the country. It is the electoral process that politicians will respond to, not the sound of sweet music.

Carmen

My experience driving to Carmen's office for our interview was a metaphor for her earlier days. I was lost and alone in my car with no one to help me read the signs and find my way. I anxiously maneuvered through the busy Chicago streets to arrive at Little Village, a Latino enclave on Chicago's near west side. I was relieved when I saw that arching the main avenue was the Little Village sign. House fronts bearing the distinct tastes of their owners lined the street. In the center of the community, houses gave way to businesses of various

types. A bridal shop, a record store, a restaurant, a laundromat, and clothing, appliance, shoe, grocery, and furniture stores paid witness to the everyday needs of communities everywhere. Following Carmen's precise directions as carefully as I could, I parked and discovered that I was, miraculously, in front of her office building. I felt reprieved, shedding the fear that always grips me when I venture alone to an unfamiliar area.

Carmen understood. The poised, articulate, risk-taking, twenty-nine year old business advisor whom I met had not so long ago been terrified at the prospect of finding her way during college orientation. She had worried about whether she would get lost, whether people would be friendly to her, whether she would be late. She had been to DePaul University before, but her father had dropped her off. For the first time in her life, she had taken the train by herself. Her mother had told her how and where to take the train, but Carmen had been very unsure and frightened and had resorted to asking directions in order to find her way. Once she arrived at school, she had to walk up eleven flights of stairs to get to her psychology class because she could not find an elevator that worked. She did not know where to sit in the class which met in a huge lecture hall. Her mother was at work in a factory just three blocks away, which was reassuring, but neither of her parents had been able to tell her anything about college, which was not.

Carmen told me that she never wanted to be dependent again, that her dependence on her parents earlier in her life had been disconcerting. Yet, she deeply valued her family life. She was as proud of her parents as they must be of her. And they had done everything that they could to protect Carmen and her younger sister.

Carmen never learned how to swim because her father would not let her go to the

park or to the public pool where she might learn to swim. When she and her sister complained, he put a pool in the back yard and said, "You want to swim, you can swim here." Carmen's mother was the intermediary who influenced her husband to allow Carmen to date her only boyfriend whom she married. She never lived among her extended family because they all lived in Hispanic neighborhoods. Carmen's father had been one of ten children from a very poor family, and he intended for his children to have as many as possible of the advantages that he had lacked. Carmen never attended a public school, was given access to a new car when she was sixteen, and always knew that she was going to college. "Hard work pays off," Carmen was taught by her parents, a maxim that they demonstrated in their lives and that Carmen, in turn, demonstrated in her own. None of the participants in this study lived fairy-tale existences, however, and Carmen was no exception.

When Carmen was growing up in Chicago, her parents worked hard to provide their two children with educational opportunity and a safe environment in which to live. At around the time Carmen turned nine years old, her family moved from their home in a changing neighborhood to an area where most of the residents were from ethnic European backgrounds. Life in the new neighborhood seemed a cruel joke since Carmen and her sister could not play on the sidewalks or in the front area of their home for fear that the neighbors would harass them. It was a tough time for the family. Carmen's parents had moved farther from their jobs so that the children would be exposed to a better neighborhood and better schools. A classmate at Carmen's new school had called her a spic, and the reception that they received from the neighbors was disheartening. In spite of these hardships, when Carmen graduated from eighth grade, she was valedictorian and took almost every award that the

school gave out. As she took the Principal's Award, she could hear her father say from the audience, "They were worried about this Hispanic. Well, this Hispanic just cleaned up all their awards, and what are the parents going to say now?"

For Carmen, hard work had paid off, and with a few exceptions, it has continued to do so. In her work for a not for profit organization, she helps people to make their hard work pay off by providing them with loans for their businesses. She is able to act independently in that when someone comes in to ask for a loan for a business venture, she establishes a relationship with the person and determines what she will do regarding the request. If she believes in the person and feels confident that he is going to repay the loan and that it may transform his life, she will sell the idea for the business to the committee. Carmen explained:

If I believe in you, I'm going to do everything in my power to convince that committee to give you that loan. I can offer that comfort, and I really, really like what I do because I'm giving back something to the community. The clients don't go through anything alone. Whatever that business goes through, I go through, too. They need somebody to believe in them. Two of my directors think I would be phenomenal in the banking field. Maybe I would, but right now this is what I want to do.

There is this comic book illustrator, an African-American, who had a comic book designed and illustrated in ink and everything. It was ready to go, but he didn't have any credit. He was extremely honest with me from the beginning. He explained that he wanted to go to the comic book convention and what he wanted to sell the comic for. He was asking for a small amount of money, but he couldn't secure a cosigner. I got him the maximum you can get on a non cosigned basis. He published his first comic. Now he teaches at Kennedy-King College, at the Duncan YMCA, and he is coordinating the first comic book convention for African- Americans at Malcolm X College.

He still works full time for the Miles Square Health Center, and he was recently awarded a contract with a pesticide company that's doing work in a Chicago Housing Authority project. The company wants to promote pest control without aerosols and baits and pesticides. They want to create this little booklet that they can pass out to residents to help them learn the new

methods of pest control. My client was raised in the projects and is mentoring one of the kids from the projects who is artistically inclined. My client had approached Marvel Comics, but they told him that he doesn't have any talent because they saw who he was rather than his art work.

In truth, he's incredible. He is on his third loan. He's paid me back three times, on time, all the time. I've hooked him up with a client who has opened a comic book shop, and his work is going in that shop. He has been featured on *Fox Thing in the Morning* and in a couple of the newspapers. He was quoted, too, at the comic book convention. All of his books have historical information as a basis. They are not all blood and guts. They are educational and are done from a multicultural basis.

Michael

With a great deal of humor and not a hint of hubris, Michael, a twenty-eight year old Latino and graduate of Yale University, told me that his parents' IQ took a quantum leap upward, or so they thought, when he received his bachelor's degree. He elaborated:

They felt that they had learned through osmosis and that the conferral of my degree was a part of them -- which I thought was really interesting. I tease my mother about it all the time. My parents achieved, almost instantaneously, this increased base of knowledge, this increased pride, this legitimization. We have a comic household; things are not right if two people are not teasing somebody else, so I can remind my family of their enhanced status through my degree and they don't mind. They are convinced that they had the right kid at the right time.

As far as going to school was concerned, I was always in the right place at the right time.

While Michael, as well as most of the study's participants, attributed much of his good fortune, especially regarding his schooling, to luck, clearly intention and design -- his own and his parents' -- were contributing factors. His parents sent him to a local parochial school for kindergarten. Noticing his academic exceptionality, his teacher suggested that he go to an

elite private school the next year. Skipping first grade completely, Michael went from kindergarten to second grade in a new school. Luckily, he left that school after eighth grade since it closed its doors the very next year. By that time, Michael was safely ensconced in one of Chicago's elite K-12 private schools. During his senior year of high school, the lucky intervention by an English teacher in his college search process resulted in his going to Yale. While there, he was lucky to have an incredibly stellar visiting professor as an instructor during both his freshman and his junior years. The professor, a Puerto Rican with a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a law degree from Yale, changed Michael's life. Now, through his work as an administrator for a not-for-profit social service agency, Michael changes the lives of others.

Michael has held two similar jobs that have enabled him to do the type of work he loves. He shared the following comments about one of them:

I went to work in Chicago for the Latin American Chamber of Commerce as a small business developer. My job entailed sitting down with people who had businesses or wanted to start them. I would help them obtain financing for their businesses, or if they were at the ideas development stage, I would help them determine whether the ideas they had for a business were viable. My job entailed all aspects of business formation. All my work was pretty much focused in the Latino neighborhood in Chicago, particularly in the Logan Square/Humboldt Park area. Most of my work was external rather than internal to the organization. I could see that I was creating tangible value outside the institution and actually in the communities themselves. I could see the measurable impacts on people's lives as well. When someone who owns a jewelry store is on the edge and you help them get a \$20,000 loan which will carry them for another year and a half, you know they are going to be able to continue to make their car payments, continue to feed their family, and continue to serve the community. It's a win/win situation for everybody involved, and I loved it!

I also found that sitting down with someone and taking their business idea out to the end and showing them that it is not viable is a very valuable

function. It stops them from sinking their resources into something that just isn't going to work. It puts them on a different track so they don't lose everything they have. I also dealt with the perception of people on the street, in the community, and among the small business owners that it should not be so hard to get money when you know that your venture is going to work. I dealt with their frustration at running into this stone wall that is the banking system time after time and finding, over and over again, that they can't get financing either by hook or by crook. That particular reality came as a shock to a lot of people. They didn't seem able to comprehend it, and understandably so, because they had been working and putting everything they had into their businesses, yet they were not worth anything to a banker. Having to deal with that kind of dejection on a pretty regular basis helped me to see clearly the necessity of putting my shoulder to the wheel and pushing with all my strength.

One of the biggest things I learned while working at the Latino Chamber of Commerce is that even in a situation where you have very poor management, an organization can continue to flourish if it is providing valuable service to its constituents. I learned that I have a definite affinity for working in the community. If I came home upset about my job, it was never because of the people I had to work with, the work I had to do, or the people I was serving. It was always because of the people I had to answer to.

When Michael began his current job, he was twenty-six years old. He was the executive director of a new social service agency with himself as the only employee. There were no offices, and he was working out of a home. With the help of added staff and a board of directors, he was able to build the organization from the ground up. In two years, they had put half a million dollars on the street in the form of loans that went directly to the people who needed them.

When Michael was in college, he experienced an awakening as a Puerto Rican. He says now that he knows he will be happy in his life as long as he can help Latinos to strengthen their families, their communities, and themselves as individuals.

Theresa

When Theresa was a child, she greatly admired her grandmother who lived with the family and went to work everyday, unlike Theresa's mother, who stayed at home. Her grandmother encouraged her independence by paying her to do small jobs that she could manage. Unlike her very protective mother, Theresa's grandmother would let her peel apples for homemade pies. Her mother would never have allowed such a thing, being afraid that Theresa would cut herself. Theresa first learned about bilingualism from her grandmother who would talk to her friends in Polish and would tell Theresa stories and sing songs and nursery rhymes to her in Polish, the grandmother's native tongue. Theresa's grandmother, a factory worker, seemed independent and knowledgeable about the world. Theresa valued and began emulating her grandmother's qualities.

When she was old enough to work, Theresa began buying most of her own clothes, purchased a stereo, and bought a car. As a college student, she tried very hard not to ask her family for any financial support. She explained:

One time when I was in a bind in college, my parents took out a parents' loan for me, but I paid it back for them right away so they wouldn't have to worry about it. They did that only once. They would give me the shirt off their backs if they knew I needed it, but I knew that I didn't want to put the other kids in danger. If my getting help would hurt the family, then I had no right to ask for it. My parents had done as much for me as they could. It was up to me to do the rest.

Theresa's work ethic of helping herself seems to have been translated into helping others to help themselves. As a twenty nine year old graduate of Southern Illinois University and a college instructor, the positive experiences of her life have joined forces with the negative ones to make her a stronger and better person -- for herself and others.

For example, in the small town of her childhood, Theresa experienced the stares and unenlightened comments of the citizenry as they observed her Caucasian parents and their multiracial children. Theresa is white, and her siblings, all of whom are younger, are Native American and Asian. At times, Theresa would be called upon by members of the public to explain her relationship to her sisters and brothers. As a heavy child, she also experienced cruelty from other children because of her weight. Her self-concept suffered, and she became very shy. In high school, a Spanish teacher let Theresa make a presentation in the teacher's office because she was too intimidated to speak in front of her class. By the time Theresa graduated, she felt that she could do two things well, sing and speak Spanish. Theresa earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Spanish and now teaches at a community college. She collaborates with her Spanish teacher from high school to carry out joint activities among high school and college students. Of her activism, Theresa stated:

I got involved in doing a lot of things in the beginning because I needed to supplement my income. Now that I am working full time, I have the luxury of volunteering. It is not that I don't need money, but I can make enough to pay my bills. I had a grant funded position that allowed me to go out into the community and do things with people who weren't at the college yet. I worked with the fire department. When I got involved with the Latino Club, I brought in the fire department to train the Latino Club members in CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). Then the Latino Club members began helping the fire department to give classes to Spanish speakers to certify them in CPR. Last year we took twenty-five members of the Latino Club to a leadership conference at the Hilton in Chicago. We are going to a conference this month at Northern Illinois University. I think my being younger makes it easier for me to make a connection with the students. They've really taken me in like one of their own. I feel like I'm part of their club and part of the community.

We've brought all kinds of speakers to the college. We met Dr. Hector Rosaldo Flores, a pianist and medical doctor, at a conference and brought him here. Dr. Antonia Novella, ex Surgeon General is someone we want to bring

here. Edward James Olmos will be at the conference we're going to this month, and we want to have him for Hispanic Heritage Month. The students are really excited.

One of the things I brought to the club is the idea that you don't have to just put up with what people tell you. People can say no, but you can find a way to get a yes. I tell the students that they can make a difference. They wrote to Gloria Estefan asking her to come here. Before, they never would have done that. I wrote to Vice-President Gore. They saw me talking to congressmen at a conference like I'm someone important. Well, I told them that we're all important, and if I can do a thing, so can they. I tell them that they're as good as the President, as anybody. That no one is higher up or better than they. That others may just have a position of power, but their power can be a resource for the students. The students just got a response from Gloria Estefan saying that she is on tour, but she will consider their request when she is not on tour. We don't want her to sing; we want her as a speaker, so the club is writing her back to see if she can come for Hispanic Heritage Month. Today the club is meeting with some people to talk about a college tour. We've been talking about different ways of using our voice.

There is no way I would have guessed two years ago that the president of the Latino Club would develop the leadership skills that he has now. When he came on a trip to Mexico that I sponsored, he took a position where people were looking up to him and asking him questions. His family is in the area, he speaks Spanish well, and he was a fountain of information for everyone. I told him that I wanted to see the same person in him when he got back here that I saw in Mexico. He decided to run for president and he won. He is doing very, very well.

There is so much that can be done at the college and in the community. I would like to start a Spanish language National Honor Society here. I volunteer to teach people at a Catholic church two nights a week. I need to establish an exchange program with the University of Guadalajara where I sponsor the summer courses. I need some more time!

Hycel

I entered Hycel's church on a Sunday morning and settled in a pew near the back. I had no choice in the matter -- though my seat suited me just fine -- for the church was

packed. I had come on a fact finding mission. I had identified Hycel as someone whom I would like to interview, and visiting his church when he was preaching, I thought, would tell me a lot about him. I came armed with paper and pen for inobtrusive note taking. The detached observer, I scanned the program, noticed the children and adults -- males and females -- in the congregation, and marveled at the number of women in the pulpit of this Baptist church and their active role in the pre-sermon rituals. Then the choir marched in singing "God Is Already Here," and all my intentions of taking notes were blown away by the sheer force and beauty of their combined voices.

I have heard that in New York, tour guides often take advantage of black churches by converging unannounced on their services for free entertainment with dozens of tourists in tow. If they converged upon Hycel's church in Evanston, Illinois, they might get more than they bargained for, or had not bargained for, to be precise. He is committed to preaching reality, and they might find that the challenge of reality could be unsettling for the tourist trade.

Hycel is a sixty year old minister, educator, and artist whose drawings adorn the walls of his office. He is an artist, too, in the way he creates the literature that is his sermons. He preaches like one whose job it is to educate his congregation by lifting the veils from their eyes. As he preached about the responsibilities of his audience as persons made in God's image, I wondered how his congregation could ever lose sight of the fact that as black people, they are beautiful and potentially great. Even though I live quite a distance from Evanston, two Sunday's later I was back to hear another of Hycel's sermons.

During the first week that I sought to arrange an interview with Hycel, he was in

Washington, D.C., with some other ministers to meet with the President of the United States. A short time later when he was available for an interview, I learned far more about him than I had been able to glean from two Sundays of sermons. He related to me a striking interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave. It may be that the enlightened person in Plato's allegory has a parallel in Hycel and that the story encapsulates the essence and the challenge of his activism. Hycel explained the allegory:

Everybody's watching the shadows on the wall. I offer my own rendition of that situation. The person who's watching those shadows as he breaks the chain on his neck can turn around and see something different from all the others who are looking at the illusion on the wall. And finally he goes up, and he notices that the configurations on the wall are configurations of people walking with pitchers on their heads. He goes further up, and he sees that there's a light shining on these configurations. He goes on up a little higher, and he sees that the light is actually an opening in the cave. He goes outside, and he's a whole lot smarter than anybody else. He sees that the sun is shining through the opening, casting light against the people against the wall. Well, that kind of enlightenment poses a dilemma because the real task is not to *tell* everybody but to get them to see. And that's what makes preaching so hard. You see hundreds and thousands of people out there looking at shadows, and you know that the shadows are only reflections of reality. It takes a lot of patience to work with people when you're looking at people and they're looking at shadows that they think are reality. At the same time, you know because of your enlightenment that there is a cause and effect relationship to everything that is occurring.

Hycel was born and raised in Ohio, his father's home, but his mother was a woman of little education from Bessemer, Alabama. Her family had migrated north just ahead of a lynch mob that was after her brothers. In her background, a "smart nigger" was a "dead nigger," and she admonished her sons to be good boys at school, but Hycel remembers her as possessed of a "raging anti-intellectualism." "My mother disdained education to such a degree that as a child I couldn't even ask her a question. She'd say, 'No, don't ask me that!'"

Hycel failed first grade and struggled through school, desiring to be as intelligent as his father who had a high school education and a great love of learning. He flunked out of three or four colleges and served a stint in the Marine Corps before beginning the journey of success in college which netted him the B.F.A. degree from Kent State and the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Vanderbilt University.

Hycel's journey of success required his coming to grips with the fragmentation in his life. He began a quest of self discovery that led him back to the beginnings of his people as slaves in America. He went back to uncover those forces that had shaped his mother who had, in turn, shaped him. He understood how the slave mentality, created on purpose, could keep black people fragmented and in ignorance over a hundred years after slavery was over. In his broad-based activism with the congregation of his church, student motivational activities, care of the homeless, tutoring services, support groups for graduate students in the thesis and dissertation writing stages, feeding the hungry, and local, state, and national politics, to name a few of his endeavors, Hycel's objective as a preacher and professor is toward wholeness in himself and in others. He teaches that while we should not be intimidated by models of achievement or immobilized by our own dire imperfections, we should work diligently toward our true potential, achieved only through wholeness:

People look at things that I do to help people become who they can be, to realize their potential and get rid of their hangups. There are various programs that we run from the church that affect getting people fed, that affect politics, that affect economics, that affect social opportunity. They are all one thing. All that I do has to do with an essential philosophy which I learned. Wholeness, that which is whole and one within itself, has power to do anything that it wants to do. A whole bird will fly and soar. A whole bee will do that which bees do normally. A whole human being will do that which is sufficient or efficient for its being. A whole race, a whole nation, is

indivisible, is awesomely powerful. And wholeness will manifest itself in all aspects, so one has only to live by that simple principle and all else happens.

The Bible is replete with magnificent models of manhood: from Adam to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; from Job to Joshua to Jeremiah to John the Baptist and John the Revelator; from Moses to Malachi; from David to the twelve Disciples; from Peter to Paul to Sampson to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and on and on until the perfect man, namely Jesus Christ. These men are more than magnificent models of manhood; they are manhood under the divine unction. They are manhood representing its most redemptive potential possibility. Yet, they are manhood inclusive of its most mundane and often miserable representation of human degradation, dehumanization, and disappointment. We need to be honest when we read about those heroes in the Bible. Adam was a perfect man, but Adam failed, and he fell. Abraham was a blessed man, but he was also a polygamist who married his half-sister, attempted to sell her into prostitution, and abused his other wives. Yet, God took Abraham and used him as the father of our great heritage of faith. Moses was a murderer, and after that an outlaw. Yet, he became the liberator of Egypt. Noah, an alcoholic who was caught naked and in a drunken stupor, was found out by his sons, almost wrecking the history of humanity. Nevertheless, God used Noah to make a whole new world. David was caught in adultery but became a man after God's own heart because he repented. Nobody knows what that thorn in Paul's side was all about, but we can speculate that Paul was struggling, and God saw fit to turn this persecutor into a liberator. And Jesus, the quintessential perfect man, became the most notorious and wanted gang leader in history. He was hunted down as a gang leader. And afterwards, they infiltrated His gang, bought off one of His gang members, and assassinated Him as a common criminal. If you had read the Roman paper at the time, not the Christian paper, you would have seen that they did not report that Jesus was a timid cream puff hanging on a cross somewhere, but that He was a gang leader whom they had had to root out and run down like the criminal they perceived Him to be.

Yet, when we read the Bible, we see niceties about these heroes. In truth, they were not perfect men; they were men like other men out there right now. Let's get the truth out. Let's talk about reality when we talk about men of the Bible. How can Biblical heroes be instructive models for people of today if we're going to make them look like sissies rather than the strong but imperfect men that they were? They were strong men with weaknesses, and they overcame them by the grace of God.

No Biblical hero is of historical significance because he simply lived and died, never made a mistake, or never did anything wrong. Like us, they

existed somewhere between the fallen Adam and the new, resurrected Adam. All of us are fallen men. What happened to us? How did we descend to our current state of woundedness? We were created in the likeness of God. We were created whole. Just as God didn't make Adam weak, a murderer, a liar, God didn't make African-American men lazy, ignorant, loiterers on street corners, jail inmates, womanizers, woman abusers. He made all of us honorable, powerful, respectful, in His image. Being whole, being one with God, is our ultimate potential. It is my goal. It is where I should exist. My life, my struggle, is in that direction of wholeness through grace.

These excerpts reflect only a few of the activist efforts of only six of this study's participants. While the activism of each participant is different from that of the others, focal to the prolific activist projects of them all is their overriding concern for the quality of life for others. Each life story presents an inspiring man or woman who strives mightily to identify and alleviate areas of concern in their own lives but especially in the lives of their fellow humans. In many of the cases, the radar used in detection and the standard measure for treatment relate in some way to the participants' own pasts. This is not to suggest that the participants see their past experiences as reflections of the present day or their present day as paeans to perfection. To the contrary, they are tireless workers rather than proselytizers. And their activism is meaningful and on target because they tend to choose it based on what they have a genuine interest in or personal knowledge about. Time and again, their stories suggest that understanding hardship leads to discovering a way out of it. Resulting in the multiplication and perpetuation of social, economic, and academic success, the perseverance, resilience, and generosity of the men and women in this study unveil, many times over, ways of breaking the generational chains of poverty, ignorance, and relegation to the lowest tiers of society. As such, the study provides a guideline for replicating educational, economic, and

social success, especially among first-generation college students, those least likely to achieve it.

Why Activism?: The Compulsion to Love

Jesus didn't set out to perform a miracle by walking on water. He had to get someplace, so he did it. He wasn't even thinking about a miracle. He wanted to get to the other side, and there was an urgency to get there. Most of the extraordinary people I've met in life. . . don't think about being extraordinary.

Hycel

One of my objectives when I began this study was to determine the imprint of academic-success-enhancing pre-college and college experiences on first-generation students' decisions to become activists as well as how these experiences affected the ways in which they lived their lives. Based on the interviews that I conducted, I identified two factors common across all of the cases that had a direct bearing on the participants' decisions to become activists and on the nature of their activist endeavors. Quite simply, and not altogether surprisingly, positive and negative experiences from their pasts played a major part in determining the participants' activist roles. It seems that the interviewees' more difficult experiences may have compelled them toward activism, while their more positive experiences may have informed the design of their activist programs.

To illustrate this point -- but at the acknowledged risk of applying too facile a gloss over the participants' lives -- I examined significant concerns or events, both positive and negative, from the participants' past experiences. Larry, for instance, faced educational discrimination during his youth as the result of a stammer when he talked. He was also deeply influenced by his father's accounts of his life as a black person in the south. Both Larry and

his father had needed a fair chance, and no one made those chances available to them. Like almost everyone else in this study, Larry decided that he would be available to curb the degree to which others endured hardships similar to his own or similar to those of people, such as his father, whom he cared about. His own interests and areas of expertise, engineering, art, and the law, influenced the design of his activist program. Thus, in the example of his activism that is quoted in the preceding pages of this chapter, Larry intervened in the life of a deserving black male who had served time in jail and was discriminated against because of his criminal record. Where else would this artistically gifted ex-con have acquired the chance that he needed?

Similarly, Jack's contributions to St. Elizabeth's Catholic School are one example of how he helps poor children to receive a good education, which would not be the case, he believes, if they were attending their neighborhood Chicago public schools. In Jack's own school experience, he had been unable to get an uninterrupted Catholic school education because his parents could not afford the tuition, and he spent years receiving poor instruction in the Chicago public schools. He tries to prevent the visitation of his experience on poor Chicago school children of today. By also investing a large part of his income in his not-for-profit organization, Jack seeks to exert a positive influence on America's moral and economic development. He is fervent in his patriotism and invokes the memory of his father in violent confrontation with the Communists who "were making the people dissatisfied with America." In the design of his activism, Jack looked to his own experience and to that of his father for the template that he would follow.

The patterns of activism of the other participants profiled in this chapter are as readily

detectable and as consistent in their reflection of the activists' pasts as are those of Larry and Jack. Both Carmen and Michael are involved in helping others, mostly Hispanics and other minorities, to develop and maintain businesses to counteract the lack of opportunity generally provided those groups by society's traditional lending institutions. As Puerto Ricans, both Carmen and Michael were raised somewhat on the periphery of a Puerto Rican identity, and their meaningful work as activists on behalf of the disenfranchised may void to some extent their own negative experiences -- as well as the experiences of those they care about -- as a result of their ethnicity. Similarly, the discrimination that Theresa encountered as an overweight, working class student would have been effectively altered by intervention such as her own into the lives of the under appreciated Latino students at the college where she now works. In Hycel's case, his mother's obfuscation about the worthwhile role of a black male in America almost ruined his life. His teaching and preaching wholeness and reality, as related in the preceeding pages of this chapter, is clearly antidotal to his mother's and to his own previous condition of fragmentation and unenlightenment.

Consideration of the participants whose stories are presented in Chapters Three through Eight shows that each selected a program of activism that would counteract their own difficult experiences or replicate or enhance their positive ones. In the following quotations, the first alludes to past experiences which informed a participant's activist programs; the second refers to his or her activist endeavors. In the first grouping, for example, we see that Mary emulates the excellent teachers who influenced her during her days as a student:

The teachers that I had in grade school and high school are still my motivators

for my work now. I know how I was helped when I was a child, and I just know that children today need our help. I know I would not be where I am today without other people. I do the best I can do in whatever I do, and I help whomever I can.

Like my mother, I love children, and that is one of the reasons I am so glad that I became an elementary school teacher. . . .

I met my husband Chester through having someone come into the classroom to enhance education for children. Many of the children in my district are very poor, and their parents cannot provide certain educational enrichments for them, so it is important for the schools to do all that they can. We had been studying sand in my class, and I contacted this glass blower from Abbott Laboratories and had him come in to demonstrate for the children. . . . I bring in various opportunities for students as often as I can. I also do classroom presentations for other teachers on my African travels and on other subjects in an effort to help children whenever I can.

Through storytelling about Native American cultures, Florence counteracts the type of ignorance about Native American people that was, by the design of her family and of society, her unfortunate experience:

When I was attending school on the reserve, my teachers, even though they were Indian, taught me zero about my culture. . . . In many respects, my teachers were as wooden as the carvings of Indians in headdress that once stood outside small town general stores. . . .

Storytelling, a major force in my activist work, brings me absolute joy. I do it naturally and everybody of all ages responds in kind, with joy. I tell my stories, I sing in Mohawk. And afterward, people come and talk to me. . . . I try to make my experience and what I have learned real for my audience. I like to invite them into the experience. And I try to keep learning, to keep getting better.

Jim's activist work with children shows him connecting with and encouraging youth in a way that never occurred in his own experience as a child or teenager:

I grew up by my own devices, pretty much on my own. My mom and dad sort of let me go. Whatever I did was o'kay. It was as if they forgot about me. Of course there was discipline set, there were rules and stuff. But they

never really paid much attention to me. . . .

I'm going to open a store for teenagers because they need a sense of how to run a business. You are never taught in college or high school or anywhere else how to live a life as an artist. . . . If the kids had a store, they could show themselves the gestalt of the art experience. I'm hooking up with Hull House to make this happen. . . . There is one area about the size of my shop that they can part with at one o'clock in the afternoons. That would work out perfectly for the kids. They could operate the store from around 1:30 to 7:00 p.m. and go through what a store owner goes through.

Lula replicates the service of helping those who are less able, just as others helped her:

I will never forget the time when I didn't have a dress or shoes to wear to a special event at Voorhees. My friend's mother had sent her two dresses. One she wore and the other, brand new, she insisted that I wear. Another friend of ours had shoes that she said were too small for her and she wanted me to wear them and stretch them to her size. So I wore my friends' finery feeling like a princess, not a beggar, because of their genuine desire to help me. . . . I think about those friends, Darling. I think about them all the time. I could never forget the things they did for me when we were going to school and I was poor and they were not.

. . . I had to learn the labor laws, but it was worth it because it exposed me to the living conditions of other people. The job heightened my caring spirit for other people. I felt that I was helping somebody, and I have always wanted to help others because somebody helped me. And I was able to help so many people. . . .

Even though many of the participants in this study play out their various activist endeavors in multiple ways, in almost every case there is a direct route from their own experiences to their programs of activism. But why they became activists is almost an afterthought as presented in their stories. In their exact sentiments if not in their exact words, these deeply empathic people became activists either because they wanted to do for others what someone, fortunately, had done for them, or they wanted to do for others what no one, unfortunately, had done for them. The interviews suggest, however, that

examination of a few qualities shared by all the participants provides room for speculation that additional factors influenced their becoming activists. These factors are considered next.

Audacious Dreaming: The Benefits of Risk

We pulled twenty-five women off welfare a while back, and I thought it was going to be real challenging to get their kids good day care and get the women training and a good job in exchange for their welfare checks. I thought I was going to get a lot of heat from their men and their families because they might not want that kind of change, but it seems to be working. . . . I'm pushing these reforms because I think they will help to put responsibility, dignity, and hope back into these women's lives, but it's real scary.

Jim

In analyzing the interviews from this study, I found that several qualities of personality were common to all the participants and appeared pivotal in their activism and in the ways that they lived their lives. While these qualities may suffer among the general population from overuse in theory and underuse in practice, they nonetheless were hallmarks of the seventeen men and women who participated in this study. Specifically, two such qualities were repeatedly accentuated in my interviews: a willingness by the participants to take risks for themselves and for others and a related issue, a willingness to live a relatively simple life. Time and again, participants discussed situations that revealed their compassion and courage in responding with their energy, influence, expertise, time, and money to causes, often high-risk ones, for other people. The interviews that I conducted suggest that their willingness to take risks was an important factor in their decisions to become activists.

That the first-generation college graduates in this study took risks to enhance their lives and the lives of others seems almost too obvious to warrant discussion. Clearly, they had to take enormous risks in most cases to develop and execute the plans that would get them

to college, help them to meet with the success required to remain at college, and result in their graduation. More demanding of explanation is *why* they were risk-takers in ways that departed so radically from their families' histories. In these pages, I seek an answer to this question by investigating the risk-taking tendencies of this study's participants and their willingness to live relatively simple lives. I then connect these investigations to the participants' decisions to become educational or social activists.

I begin by pointing out that responsible people weigh the probable consequences of their actions prior to carrying them out. If the losses and benefits of an action seem to warrant its execution, only then does the responsible person carry it out. But whether the approximated losses and benefits of an action are seen as warranting execution may depend on factors far removed from the degree to which the person is responsible. That said, the participants in this study became first-generation college graduates in part because they were responsible risk-takers. Since others in their families may also have been responsible risk-takers, a question which presents itself is "What was it that made the participants' risk-taking net such different gains?"

First, while they may not have been either more or less responsible than their siblings or others in their environments, this study's participants were probably able to define responsible risks more broadly than were others. Thus, the risk of giving up a "good job" in the present in favor of earning a college degree and qualifying for a better or different job in the future appeared more responsible under the broader definition of the interviewees than it did to their families. Still, the risk was overwhelming for many of the participants. As Velma put it:

After high school, I went to New Orleans for a year and a half. My mom had died. . . . I had a job in a department store. I told my supervisor I was going to go to college and the response was, "You're sure you want to go to college?" I started in January, 1974. I left on a Monday morning, and it took the bus all day to cover what is a three hour drive. My luggage wasn't with me when I got there in the afternoon. I didn't have any money. . . . I got registered, but I got in wrong lines. It was a tremendously hard experience. I was there by myself. It was a very traumatic experience for me. I knew I had left my little job. I had not achieved a great amount of success, but still I was living, making a living. But I wanted to go to college. I wanted to get a college education. I didn't know if I would finish. I'd say to myself, "If I can just make it through this semester, maybe I'll leave it alone." But at the end of the semester, something would enable me to go on.

If leaving the security of a job for the uncertainty of college was so frightening, the forces that made college attendance a responsible risk for Velma and for most others in the study were indeed significant. Evidence for the identification of these forces points, I think, to those basic qualities with which I began my analysis of the interviews: special status, positive naming, and ascending cross-class identification. In other words, special status, positive naming, and ascending cross-class identification may have influenced the interviewees' identification of a responsible risk and, by extension, their decisions to become educational or social activists. Consequently, I end my analysis with a brief discussion of those factors with which it began.

Special status people are often freer to take calculated risks to effect their own well being than others may be. Having experienced repeatedly the benefits of being special, they form expectations that fortuitous occurrences which fall outside the norm of events for others in their world may actually work for them. If they have been positively named, their confidence has been further supported, and they may have determined with a degree of faith a direction for realizing their potential. Since the power of positive naming lies in its

credibility, students will believe their teachers' assessments that they should go to college, as Velma did in the preceding passage, and the threads of hope that their aspirations will be realized are automatically strengthened. This is one manner by which a foundation of reason and responsibility was added to special status participants' calculated risks that they could become not only first-generation college graduates but also anything else, including educational or social activists, that they set their minds on becoming. Again, Velma's words remind us of how the participants were willing to embrace the "Yes I can!" philosophy:

I went to New Orleans for two weeks after graduation and then went back to Alcorn and waited for the Upward Bound program to hire me for the summer. That's the only thing I wanted to do. It didn't pay much -- just enough to get me to Bowling Green. I had finished Alcorn in three years. I learned from that experience with Upward Bound that I could be a leader and a teacher.

In graduate school I studied pop culture. I was the first African American female in the Department of Pop Culture to get a degree at Bowling Green. My department chair was very encouraging. He encouraged me to write papers, and I got my first bibliography of the cable industry published in a journal of public T.V. I realized I could be a researcher at Bowling Green.

Special status and positive naming enhanced the courage of the interviewees to take risks, and their risk-taking often paid off.

Another important component of the participants' foundations for responsible risk-taking was provided through ascending cross-class identification. By creating a source for critical information about what they wanted to become and, sometimes, how they could go about achieving the goal of becoming, ascending cross-class identification added substance and reality to the participants' aspirations. Armed with the information gathered through ascending cross-class identification, the interviewees could take risks that were much more

informed than would have been the case if those same risks were taken by a sibling who did not share the participants' privileged information. In other words, while the participants' situations within the confines of their families may have appeared to be the same as everyone else's, in almost all cases they were, in fact, quite different with advantages such as different information and greater confidence falling on the side of the participants. These advantages improved the interviewees' chances of achieving their goals.

Along with help from pre-mentors, teachers, community members and organizations, professors, peers, and others, responsible risk-taking on their own behalf worked for the participants in this study, and they achieved college degrees. The extension from risk-taking for their own benefit to risk-taking for others was a natural progression made easier by the fact that the participants, to a person, were compassionate people who preferred to live relatively simple lives. Since none of the seventeen were interested in amassing a great deal of personal wealth, they were free to give of their time and money to deserving others.

By way of example, Larry, a lawyer, is a contradiction of the easy conclusions resulting from stereotypic thinking about the way lawyers live their professional lives. As is true of every participant after college graduation, Larry is a risk taker who refuses to do that which does not meet his standard of responsibility. He turned down a job after graduate school because he just did not like the area where he would have had to live. He went into private practice instead with no clients or money. He tacked his name up over the door and experienced six very lean months, doing the overflow work that his boss gave him. His cases included divorce, shoplifting, drunk driving, contract disputes, wills, probates, and estates. The other lawyers' clients represented the center of human misery. Larry took the financial

risk of refusing to serve those clients:

My clients weren't representative of the scum of humanity. There were five other lawyers in the office, and *their* clients were. We had rapists, murderers, bank robbers, everything going through the office. It was hard for me. And although I had certain people come to me who were murderers, rapists, and robbers wanting me to represent them, I refused to do so. My view was I refused or they needed to understand that it wasn't in their best interest to have me represent them. I'd say, "I can probably get you off with fifteen years on this one; maybe twenty; maybe the death chamber. If you're guilty of the crime, you're guilty and you've got to pay. It's as simple as that."

In the following example, we see Larry taking an informed risk out of compassion for innocent people whom he had never met:

I was able to help a lot of people -- sometimes not in accordance with ethical rules -- but, nevertheless, help them. I remember a taxi driver who came to me in the late 1970s. He had told his wife to come down to the bank and sign on a \$10,000 loan. That was a lot of money at that time. He had a deal that was hot, and he needed his wife to sign so their house could be secured for this loan. His wife was a home maker who had no idea what was really going on, so he got the money and went and bet it on a horse. The horse fell down and broke its neck -- didn't even finish the race. Now, the guy was in trouble. He came to me and said, "I'm in trouble. I borrowed this money and I've got to pay and I can't. And I'm going to lose my house. My wife and kids are upset." I said, "Here's what we're gonna do. It ain't right, but we're gonna do it. We'll file bankruptcy for you, but not for your wife. That way, she'll owe the money, but you won't. The house is in both names, and the bank can't foreclose on the house until she dies."

The bank was pissed. The lawyers for the bank called me every name but God's child. They said that I was screwing up the system, using it, all kinds of things like that, and they were right. I took advantage of a loophole to save this man's house for his wife and kids. At that time, I was in private practice, and I felt good about what I did. But if I were to do that today, I would be kicked out of my firm.

Corollary issues, such as more money than one needs to live simply, appear to be far down on the list of priorities for everyone in this study. Again, Larry's voice is representative of the participants:

Integrity maintenance among lawyers is normal, not different. My mother used to say, "Never treat anyone different from the way you want to be treated yourself." "My father would say, "You have to earn your own living. You shouldn't be expecting handouts because no one owes you anything." From my mother, I got "respect other people," and from my dad, I got "work for your own living." These are two hard principles that are so deeply ingrained in me. Integrity means treating people with respect and not abusing a trust, and to me integrity is normal. People want to do right -- inherently.

There have been different opportunities that have arisen, and I've had to make a choice to be honest or to be rich. I choose to be honest. It brings further opportunity. I won't even give a second thought to taking someone's money because it's not in my program. I have had the opportunity to do so many times. I would gain in the short term and lose in the long. That doesn't pay.

Another voice espousing simple living is Jim's:

I make a difference in my own life by living as simply as I can. Right now I'm trying to live on \$5,500 a year. My costs are down to about \$20,000 or \$22,000 for my expenses, and I try to live on \$100 per week. It's a little bit hard . . . but there are ways of doing it without Public Aid, and the rest of my income I give away. I'm serious about the job description that I wrote when I was just starting out. I wrote that I wanted to effect social change and that would be my job, so if I have anything extra, and I'm a commercial artist, I'm not really being true to what my job is. When I was at Berkeley, I was particularly affected by something the professors used to say: "Artists are very poor but that's good because then they are living on the edge of a picket fence and they are always telling the truth. You have to tell the truth and money has to be completely out of the picture or very, very secondary." But you get tired. Every once in a while, I'll sell a painting for \$10,000 or so and take a little vacation.

Bob expressed a similar sentiment:

No matter how well you do in art, there's always more to do. If you're ninety, you can still keep going because there's no limit. That's what my motivation is. I see people do things for money, but for me the issue is time and doing the stuff that I value. I can remember doing things because I liked what I produced, and then I found that I didn't care about the product so much. It was a process, the doing, not the product or money that mattered. . . I don't have a lot of drive to make more money because I'm content. I'm

easily content. I feel like I'm very lucky. I have all the stuff I want. . . . I have my cars. I have all the art supplies I ever wanted. I get time to do my artwork, and I get to help people out. I'm doing exactly what I want.

Jack reiterated the preference, common among the participants, to live a relatively simple life:

I get money from my business. The personal money that I make I put back. . . . I live well. I'm a rich man. I've got freedom, a new Lincoln every two years, a nice home, though it's no palace. And I can do what I want. What's the salary for the pope?

The interviews that I conducted present the participants in the preceding excerpts and throughout the life stories as imbued with a proclivity to take informed risks that has had a pivotal effect on their academic successes, on their lives in general, and on their activism. Many demonstrated the willingness to take a calculated risk long before college, and in some cases this independence of action directly affected their chances of getting to college. Moreover, aspects of their calculated risk taking to enhance their own educational opportunity was often reprised in their activist work. For example, when Gaoke heard that the schools were going to be reopened during the Cultural Revolution, he was in a remote area where he had been sent to work on a farm. He formed a study group with four other youths, and they studied every night and on days when it rained so hard they could not carry on with the farm work. Even when they were working, the youths would discuss questions that they had about the materials they were studying. They used books borrowed from older students who were in school before 1966 and focused their study on science in particular, believing that scientific knowledge was not changing very much. For Gaoke, at risk was studying very hard for nothing and falsely raising the hopes of his friends that an almost

nonexistent chance of their getting into high school would materialize. When they took the exams for admission to high school, four of the five were accepted. This was a tremendous accomplishment, for over 2,000 students had competed for only 800 possible seats in high school classrooms. This triumph has definite overtones in the Chinese school that Gaoke has instituted for Chinese youth living in his current residential area.

Jim provides another striking example of risk-taking for himself which later informed his activism. Throughout his pre-college years, neither his family nor his schools seemed to care very much about his education. While his father seemed to prefer Jim to his older brother, neither parent connected with Jim in a meaningful way. No role models came forward from the community. Knowing full well that his family expected him to learn a trade and get a job after high school graduation, during high school Jim took the risk of studying architecture “under the guise that it was a trade.” Having decided that he wanted to be an architect, he risked leaving home and girlfriend for Berkeley, California, where he hoped to enroll at the university. He earned the money to go to Berkeley, actually got himself enrolled, escaped the madness at Berkeley by dropping out of college during the Vietnam War demonstrations, discovered and travelled to San Miguel Allende in Mexico to work and study with excellent and focused artists, finished his degree in San Diego, went to New York and aligned himself with the Art League because he had “heard that the art league would work you to death and give you some good disciplines,” and went to graduate school. These and other actions attest to Jim’s propensity to take informed risks. As his case history indicates, his risk-taking college experiences were as varied as his current risk-taking activism, which includes his rehabbing an entire town, providing school children in a blue collar town with an

art mobile, and using proceeds from art work to benefit the homeless and members of the old Negro Baseball League.

There was a great deal of evidence in the interviews that by meeting bias, ignorance, or insult with enlightenment, the participants often risked being judged non assertive or not commanding of respect. As they explained it, this, too, is activism that demands to be carried out as often as the opportunity presents itself. For instance, Theresa, who is white and comes from a family of two Caucasian parents and five adopted children -- one of whom is Native American and three of whom are Asian -- explained that reacting to people's prejudices with anger rather than understanding is counterproductive, wastes an opportunity for learning, and risks the perpetuation of ignorance:

A lot of times when I was younger, I'd go to the mall with my sisters and brothers and people would say, "Oh, are you babysitting?" And I'd say, "Yeah, my mom and dad went out so I got stuck with the kids." Then they'd look with their jaws kinda hanging. They'd blabber, "What? What did you just say? Is this your sister?" Then I would realize, and I would explain, "We're all adopted. That's why we don't all look the same." When my father died a few weeks ago, my sister had friends who came to the funeral, and they kept saying, "Well, where's your mother?" because they could see what my father looked like; he was lying there in the casket. And my sister said, "That woman over there with the gray hair. That's my mother." And her friends were like, "Wait a minute! We don't understand this!" My sister said, "Ohhhhh . . . we're adopted!" When my father died, he was at the university with my youngest sister, taking her back to school. They had been getting ready to get on the elevator to take her things up to her room. The paramedics arrived and one of them said, "Well, who knows this guy? Who does he belong to?" And my sister was standing right there over my dad. She said, "He's my father!" Because she's Asian, they couldn't fathom that she had a familial connection. It takes us by surprise because we forget that we look different.

I grew up with my mom getting angry at people who reacted to us in a certain way. My brother who is Native American would get really, really dark in the summer time. My parents are pretty light, and I am too. So, we'd go to the grocery store, and if someone were staring . . . my mom would say,

“What are you looking at? Do you have a problem?” She taught me to stand up, but I don’t get angry because it’s better to teach people that what they thought they knew is wrong.

Theresa’s example is reflective of the strong moral core that seems to run throughout the participants. Instead of judging other people’s ignorance as a personal affront, Theresa simply risks letting them think that she “has no feelings” by kindly enlightening them. She believes that providing people with missing information is much preferable to protecting one’s ego by retaliating against them because they are ignorant. She explained that she grew up in a town where a greater degree of racial and cultural diversity existed in her home than in all the rest of the municipality combined. When one of Theresa’s younger sisters was in third or fourth grade and came home upset because the children at school were calling her Chinese, Theresa advised her sister to tell the children, “I’m Korean, not Chinese.” The children had nothing more to say on the subject. They knew little of China and far less of Korea. Their ignorance was kindly, if matter of factly, suggested to them, and, not getting the vulnerable or defensive response they may have expected, they settled on having a friend who simply looked different from themselves. Theresa explained that she practices this form of activism daily in her classroom and in her life. She elaborated:

Since I am in a position of power in the classroom, I have to use that power the very best way that I can. I always hated people who would use power to make other people feel like nothing. Since I did at one point feel like nothing, I know what it feels like, and it doesn’t feel very good. So I do my very, very best to make people feel good about themselves, to give them confidence, because I don’t want anyone to feel the way I felt.

When I was growing up, since my mom liked to keep us well fed and to take the very best care of us that she could, I grew up as a very, very heavy child. So I was the butt of a lot of jokes and a lot of really harsh treatment. There were many days when I would come home from school crying. I was

always wondering why someone should be treated like that because it was horrible. Now, I don't want to give the impression that I'm Superwoman, but every time I see something unjust, someone being treated unfairly, I'll take the risk of speaking up and saying that that's not right, that there's no reason that we should be mean to somebody else. . . . A whole lot of times I think it really was class structure and the socio-economic thing working against me. I found that a lot of people who are treated unfairly just get angry and make a lot of noise. I think that doesn't help at all. You need to educate people, to show them, "This isn't the way to do things." You have to risk your ego and just help people to learn.

Throughout the life stories of the participants, there is evidence, both explicit and implied, that the participants became activists because they wanted to enhance the quality of life of others. Most lived by principles formed in the early years of their lives. Jim's aim was "to do something where I could make a difference in people's lives." Jack's guiding principle was, "If morality is any good, it applies everywhere: in me, in my family, in my work, in my community, in my country." When Mary was twelve years old, she determined that she would "treat others like I want to be treated." All of the interviewees connected aspects of their activism to their actual life experiences. And a willingness to take risks for themselves and for others seemed to connect the entire life experience of each participant from their earliest days as children until the activism of their current lives. Their consistent willingness to take informed risks to effect positive change is testament to their optimism and to the personal responsibility that they have accepted for the *condition of things* in the world.

CHAPTER XI

IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

I can't imagine my life had I not gone to college. What would I have done? I couldn't have been happy. The people I knew got factory jobs, and those factories don't exist anymore. And my college degree helped me to affect the lives of other people! Every teacher that you'll ever talk to is gonna be able to tell stories of those former students who called up, came back, sent cards, or did something else, letting you know what it is that happened for them because they had you to support them, because you looked out for their interests. I think that's the great thing about being a teacher.

Nancy

Let us consider, albeit in a brief and general way, the costs and benefits to society of the educations received by the seventeen men and women in this study. From their interviews, it seems clear that society's conventional contributions to their academic successes were far below society's average contributions to the educations of students whom educational institutions traditionally value. By contrast, the participants' contributions to society are exceedingly far above the normal range of contributions by average citizens. For society, the participants and their contributions are gold mines discovered on seemingly worthless ground. There is a lesson buried here. It is that the legendary exclamation of the nineteenth century gold miner in the American west is still appropriate: "Thar's gold in them thar' hills!" The hills of our present times are the masses of poor, minority, working class, or other undereducated groups within our society. The gold in this case is those individuals, children and adults, who can improve their lives and the lives of others by earning a college degree. The native ability

to learn occurs biologically within the same range of frequency among low socioeconomic status people as it does among the more economically privileged. Not to develop these natural resources is wasteful, often mean-spirited, and even traitorous since it undermines the social and economic health of the nation.

In our brief consideration of the costs and benefits to society of the educations received by this study's participants, it is important to note the positive reverberations of their college degrees on their families. For example, Ray, whose father could not read or write, has a sister who has completed most of the course work toward a bachelor's degree; a nephew who holds bachelor's and master's degrees and is a respected politician in a large city; a niece who is a lawyer; one who holds a bachelor's degree; several who have some college course work, including two with vocational/technical program certification; a nephew entering his sophomore year of college; and a niece entering her freshman year. Ray's own child completed a bachelor's degree in six semesters and has just graduated from medical school. As an instrument of change, Ray has built a bridge from illiteracy to the highest levels of academic accomplishment. When he graduated from college and changed his standard of living, Ray's family's mindset shifted, and a college degree became a coveted goal. By his example, Ray bridged the expanse for many members of his family between the lower and the middle class ways of life.

All of the participants who have siblings or children have similarly affected their aspirations. Velma, for instance, has four older siblings who went to college, following her lead. One of her older brothers is an aeronautical engineer, another older brother and a sister completed several college courses, and an older sister earned an associate's degree. Velma

told me how she urged her sister to enroll in the local community college and accompanied her to the campus to get a catalogue, an application form, and other materials necessary to the admissions process. Velma indicated that her sister had lived in the same place for fifteen years, but once she had earned her college degree, she acquired a better job and “moved on up to a better, different place in California.” She has since received additional education and has landed even better jobs. Two of Velma’s nephews have attended college, and two nieces are currently enrolled.

Bob provides another example of how a first-generation college graduate can affect the lives and mindset of his or her family members. Both of his older siblings earned bachelor’s and advanced degrees after he went to college. His younger brother also holds a college degree, and all of his siblings are financially very successful. Hycel, Ken, Jack, Florence, and Nancy all have children who have earned college degrees. In fact, only two of the participants have at least one child old enough to earn a college degree who has not done so at this time.

The participants in this study are successes, then, not only in their own educational achievements, but also in their effects on others through their activism, as well as in their influence on immediate and extended family members. They are invaluable citizens and humanitarians who make a difference every day in the lives of others with whom they interact. The world is in need of more people like them, and finding their way to academic success, both as children and as college students, should be made a lot easier. Consideration of how this will best occur should be given unstinting attention.

With this in mind, in this chapter I summarize the major findings and conclusions from

this study regarding the educational experiences and subsequent activism of the first-generation college graduates whose lives are examined here. Together with Chapters 3 through 7, Chapters 8, 9, and 10 present a range of events in the lives of the participants. Specifically, Chapters 8, 9, and 10 draw out of the interviews examples which support points of analysis regarding the family and life experiences that had a positive effect on the interviewees' earning their college degrees (Chapter 8); their collegiate experiences that had such an effect (Chapter 9); and the imprints of those experiences on the participants' lives as well as on their activism (Chapter 10). In this chapter, I summarize the major findings from this study and then offer my final conclusions concerning the academic success of first-generation college graduates and their decisions to become educational or social activists. I likewise discuss the implications that this research may have for positively affecting educational opportunities for children and first-generation college students. I conclude with my recommendations for further study and research.

A Retrospective

In my life, I try to learn, and I try to share with others what I know. I know that peace, love, and understanding start right here, with me. If I feel a sense of joy, of love, and I walk into a school and I smile, people smile back because they're happy. What kind of experience do I want today? What I project is the kind of experience that I can have.

Florence

The interviews from this study present new findings about the academic success of first-generation college graduates from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. For instance, the finding that special status as a young child is significant in the experiences of the first-generation college graduates in the study is accompanied by a suggestion as to why this is true

in each case, as well as how special status affects college success. As I demonstrated near the beginning of this chapter, Mary's special status resulted in her exposure to a different world represented by a little girl with books. Mary recounts that afterwards she would cry and beg her father to buy a newspaper so that she could have something to read. She tried hard to read the Bible, the only book that the family owned, in a situation sadly reminiscent of a Dickinson poem: "Had I not seen the Sun / I could have borne the shade / But Light a newer Wilderness / My Wilderness has made-" (1955, p.858). Being exposed to a different view of possibility may have been especially empowering for Mary and may have allowed her to adjust her self-concept in ways that were outside the experiential backgrounds of her siblings. Her desire to read may have led to her ability to read and may have expanded exponentially into her success at college. As a voracious reader, Mary wove another connection between herself and other first-generation college graduates.

Ray's association with his Fresh Air Camp hosts provides another example of special status which was unavailable to his siblings. His host family not only welcomed him into their educated and middle class lives, they also appeared to love him, sponsoring his return to their home every summer until he was old enough to begin working. The influence of this family, and others, on Ray's life encouraged him to aspire to go to college and to determine what he needed to do in order to achieve his goal. His ascending cross-class identification with the educated middle class was certainly pivotal in his getting to college. In terms of his being successful while he was there, it seems that the motivation to join this new world with which he had come to identify may have strengthened his resolve to succeed. A refrain heard throughout the interviews was "You have to know what you want, and you have to go out

there and get it.” In every case, what the participants in the study wanted primarily was an education.

Just as ascending cross-class identification motivated the first-generation college graduates in the study to aspire to go to college and to achieve once they got there, so did the shock of recognition sometimes apparent in same-class identification. As participants saw their futures mirrored in the seemingly unaccomplished lives of persons from their own class, they were even more motivated to do better for themselves through education. The instance in which same-class identification seemed to have a consistently positive motivating force was when the participants identified with a parent whom they saw as very intelligent, albeit often poorly educated, or very interested in reading or in education.

Identification seems to be a powerful force in the lives of children and of adults. And positive naming, an affirmation freely bestowed by someone who is respected, assures the recipient, adult or child, that they are seen as special in a significant way. The status or credentials -- official or unofficial -- of the namer carry the authority required for validation, so the receiver can seriously consider identifying with the new name. In the educational experiences of the participants, positive naming by a professor often preceded greater academic success or entry into a successful academic endeavor. In effect, positive naming created or strengthened belief in one's self, and belief made actualization possible.

Judging from the data, enough cannot be said about the positive effects that K-12 teachers and schools can have on the subsequent success of pupils who will become the first in their families to go to college. By giving students not simply a good academic foundation, but by also sharing with them knowledge and experiences that will expand their spheres of

reality, teachers and schools can transform students' lives. Turning students on to learning, according to the data, is a gift to the students and to society that is marvelous in its perennial renewal and its benefit of joy. It helps students to adjust their self-concepts and to see themselves as successful college students and graduates.

Similarly, not enough can be said about the power of positive connections between first-generation college students and their professors. Students have persevered because of the connections that they have established with sympathetic faculty. Students have patterned their life's work on the content, practices, and principles that they have seen demonstrated by their dynamic teachers. It should be understood that first-generation college students are as intelligent as members of any cross section of the population and require excellent but challenging professors rather than professors who are merely challenging. Varying class structure, delivery modes, and assessment strategies may include students who otherwise may be excluded. Inclusion can be validating, thus empowering students to become themselves by developing their authentic voices.

Data from this study likewise indicate that the experiences, both good and bad, previously described in Chapter 10 played a significant role in informing the nature of activism in the participants' lives. Stated differently, it seems that the positive and the negative experiences in the lives of the participants became part of the foundation of their programs of activism. However, it appears that the more difficult experiences may have compelled the participants toward activism while the more positive experiences may have strongly influenced the templates for the design of their activist programs. Moreover, interviews from this study indicate that the willingness with which the participants took calculated risks enhanced their

abilities to create positive change. Clearly empathetic, these individuals seem to have launched campaigns to switch the tracks for themselves and others, focusing their energies on improving the plights of those whose circumstances might reflect their own pasts. To the degree that the participants are successful as activists, their negative past experiences will be redemptive while the positive will be refined, replicated, and renewed many times over.

Prescriptions from Lives: Insights Gleaned from a Study
of First-Generation College Graduates

They would say, "You know better. You know the training you had on St. Helena."

Lula

Throughout most of this study, my primary concern has been the identification of factors contributing to the academic success of specific first-generation college graduates and to their decisions to become educational or social activists. In these final pages, my focus turns to conclusions that I have drawn from this study, some implications of the study for promoting the success of potential and actual first-generation college graduates, and my recommendations for further study and research. I believe that by applying lessons learned from the participants' life stories, we can enhance society's access to the benefits of their illustrious lives.

1. The process by which the participants in this study succeeded in becoming the first in their families to attend college and to earn a college degree was not a part of a comprehensive plan.

The results of this study indicate that the family and life experiences which increased the participants' chances of earning college degrees arose from diverse sources. Largely

“piece meal” and unconnected by a comprehensive plan or vision for the students’ educational well being, these experiences, nevertheless, helped the participants to become academically successful almost in spite of the institutions whose rightful job it was to do so.

Some of these aids may have come from sources totally outside the educational arena. One example is pre-mentors who, despite their own illiteracy in some cases, predisposed the interviewees to value education. At largely the same time, significant adults gave them special status, and others positively named them. Teachers and community members were among those who exposed the participants to worlds far different from the environments that they had known. And the participants took advantage of the opportunities afforded them, turning bleak outlooks into triumphant lives. Each of the seventeen is an exceptional person.

Their exceptionality is evident in their examples of ascending cross-class identification where they demonstrated not only the ability to envision themselves as different from almost everyone else in their previous world views but also the audacity to try placing firm foundations under those dreams. In many instances, their successes with ascending cross-class identification actually showed them counteracting the familial, societal, and cultural forces of their places and times. For instance, Hycel spoke with awe and anger when he told me that there is truth in “On How to Make a Slave,” a speech delivered in 1712 by William Lynch, a white slave owner, on the banks of the James River. Lynch predicted that if his methods of slave breaking were followed, blacks would comport themselves in a manner befitting slaves for hundreds of years to come with little or no remediation. But “If you can make a slave, you can unmake one,” Hycel stated without a shred of doubt. Indeed, the unmaking of slavery in its many guises of poverty, illiteracy, second class citizenship, and other social ills is the

business that has involved the interviewees, and most of them began with the unmaking of slavery in themselves. Think of the strength and character that they displayed during ascending cross-class identification. By aspiring to be different, most of them went against the conditioning of countless generations and reversed the magnetic holds upon themselves as compass points. Remembering that their steps to success were the results of disparate, disconnected forces helps us to understand the tenuous nature of their climbs. Without a comprehensive plan to chart their courses, their success depended in large part upon happenstance.

2. Conditions leading to the participants' successes in academics and as activists are identifiable and replicable.

In fact, one of the most important conclusions of the study is that the success experienced by each of the seventeen participants is not solely a result of their extraordinary powers. To the contrary, this study begins to demystify the participants' differences from others in their environments. By showing how they were -- and why they could be -- so different from their siblings and others, the study clarifies the processes by which the interviewees' metamorphoses took place. It identifies these practical processes, and, by so doing, makes them readily replicable.

For example, the processes by which Jack became an academic success are clearly identifiable and include the benefits of pre-mentoring. As the youngest of five children, Jack was taught the alphabet and the rudiments of reading by an older sister before he was of school age. "I've been a quick study all my life," Jack told me, and the coaching and modeling in reading provided by his sister proved of great benefit. However, when he left the public

school system for third grade at St. Jerome Catholic School, he was demoted to second grade because his skills were lacking. "They taught phonics," he said. "The first word I ever deciphered phonetically was n-a-m-e. My teacher put it on the board and had me sound it out. I said, 'nommy.' Got it wrong."

While many of Jack's years as a public school student were downright uninspiring, he was saved by his increasing ability to read and his love of books. He explained:

I'd read ahead in texts and get other things to read. I did an awful lot of reading. There were books in our house the other kids had in school. . . . My mother would say, "You're going to ruin your eyes," and I'd be under the covers at night reading with a flashlight. If you can't read, you really close the door on knowledge.

As a result of pre-mentoring by his sister, Jack developed as a young child the lifelong practice of reading every day. In his case -- as well as in the cases of most of the participants in this study -- other conditions such as special status, positive naming, ascending cross-class identification, positive connections with professors, and the ability to forge a positive sense of self were identifiable and crucial in promoting success in academics and activism. Those conditions can be readily replicated for other potential and actual first-generation college students.

3. Developing a positive sense of identity within the college setting greatly influenced the college success of the participants.

I learned from interviewees that their college success was greatly impacted upon by their abilities to find their places within the collegiate setting. For many, this was a difficult task since they were prone to enter college "by hook or by crook," without adequate advisement, academic preparation, financial aid, or encouragement. Such "back door" access

tended to cast the participants -- in their own views as well as in the minds of others -- as imposters or interlopers which exacerbated their already extant feelings of not belonging.

Participants' feelings of self doubt were compounded in many cases by the need to reconcile their old identities of home with their emerging identities of college student. In *This Fine Place So Far From Home*, Law (1995) describes the price of not reconciling the two:

My mother, I know, was proud of me and glad that I was doing well in a world she had never known. What she could not have guessed, though, was that in the course of my teacher training, I learned, through myriad covert (and some not so covert) pressures and practices, to feel increasingly ashamed of my home, of my family. Again and again, I heard that children who do not read, whose parents work too hard and who have little time or skills to read to them, whose homes are not "literate" but oral and often pretty nonverbal as well, children who have never been taken to an art museum or who do not have library cards, these are the ones at risk, the ones most likely to fail (be failed by?) the traditional academic setting . . . the ones who make a teacher's job so frustrating. Never once did any of my professors entertain the thought that I or any of my classmates could possibly have been one of those children.

. . .

It becomes the university's job to help children of the working class, when by some fluke or flash of good fortune they become undergraduates, to overcome their backgrounds. As Laurel Johnson Black writes . . . "It's about every child's nightmare of losing her family and the ways in which the academy tries to make that nightmare come true, to make it not a nightmare but a dream, a goal." I eventually made that dream my own and day by day betrayed myself in order to gain acceptance in the academic community; my strategy was silence and lies. I never confessed that I recognized my own home in the patronizing, contemptuous examples of my well-intentioned professors, which every day increased my resolve to erase my past and elude the humiliation of being found an imposter. (pp. 2-3)

This study shows how the participants came to understand their own senses of vulnerability and how this awareness led them to reconcile their identities of home with their identities of college. This, in turn, enabled the participants to work toward a wholeness of personality that could comfortably span two worlds. The study shows these first-generation

college graduates becoming, rather than losing, themselves. It shows them adding to, rather than subtracting from, their senses of self. It shows many of them expressing objective truths about, rather than being embarrassed about, their parents. By developing positive senses of identity, the study's participants were able to create for themselves comfort zones in both cultures, thereby reducing fear, fragmentation, and other similar detractors from the ability to learn.

This study also stresses the significance of personal connections that these first-generation college students made with professors, peers, and others through in-class and out-of-class -- including work -- experiences. Indeed, most of the participants attributed to such connections a great deal of responsibility for their ability to establish positive identities and a sense of belonging on the campus. In terms of connecting with students, professors were important to the participants' academic successes far beyond their duties as instructors. The interviews indicate that the current debate over the dual professorial roles of researchers versus teachers should contain a third component which includes more directly the nurturing and mentoring of students. Through abundant examples, the study demonstrates that the ability to make affirming connections with others was often the adhesive needed to help a participant stick with the pursuit of a college degree. As a case in counterpoint, when Diane could not connect with anyone or forge an identity on campus, she dropped out:

They didn't do a very good job of supporting students. That is the problem with many huge universities. Nobody gets to know you. You don't talk to your professors. You talk to your TA's if they happen to care. Right before dropping out, I went in to the student center and I said, "Well, gee, I need to talk to someone; I'm depressed." And that was sort of like being in a mill somewhere. You go in there, and they time you. "Okay, you have five minutes. What's your problem?" I was depressed because I didn't understand

my purpose anymore for being there. I didn't feel sure anymore. I didn't have anyone to talk to, and I needed some help. His solution to me . . . was to go to a health clinic and get some Lithium. That's when I went home.

4. A willingness to take informed risks is a key factor in the educational successes of the participants and in their decisions to become activists.

A final primary conclusion of this study concerns the tendency of the participants to take significant risks in an effort to prevail over seemingly insurmountable obstacles, to achieve success in those efforts, and, then, to take additional risks to overturn similar obstacles on behalf of other people. The study provides strong evidence that a sense of security or self-worth may have enhanced the participants' propensity to take informed risks for their own and for others' benefits. Moreover, evidence points to affirmations gained through avenues such as special status, positive naming, and ascending cross-class identification as foundations for confidence and self-esteem sufficient to promote risk-taking. As I learned, when individuals are secure enough to believe that they can recover from making a mistake, they will be more willing to take an informed but high risk with the possibility of commensurate, though long range, payoffs. The participants in this study were clearly such people. Having been "special" in some way during their early lives, they knew their right to be and do. Having been positively named, they knew that for them better circumstances were in store. Having experienced ascending cross-class identification, they knew what those better circumstances might turn out to be. Thus, however destitute or uncertain they may have felt, the participants evinced a tinge of the royalty that is latent, according to Emerson, in everyone. Their empowerment stemmed basically from their deep and abiding understanding that they counted:

The world has been instructed by its kings, who have so magnetized the eyes of nations. It has been taught by this colossal symbol the mutual reverence that is due from man to man. The joyful loyalty with which men have everywhere suffered the king, the noble, or the great proprietor to walk among them by a law of his own, make his own scale of men and things and reverse theirs, pay for benefits not with money but with honor, and represent the law in his person, was the hieroglyphic by which they obscurely signified their consciousness of their own right and comeliness, the right of every man. (Emerson, 1841, p. 514)

Implications of the Study for Promoting the Success
of First-Generation College Graduates

If I clap my hands, I want the sound that goes out to be a positive rather than a negative sound because I believe that it travels forever through the universe. That's where the love is, then. It's in our actions and in our intentions.

Jim

With regard to their social, economic, and educational backgrounds, many of this study's participants came from families that were reminiscent of those whom Lady Liberty would illuminate. Indeed, the inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty is a noble, if paternalistic, invitation. "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore" (Lazarus, 1883, p. 510), it intones without any hint of its long range plans for such a dubious gift. Nor does it concede in its magnanimity the value of the "huddled masses" or "teeming refuse" beyond its recognition of their humanness in wanting to be free. This study presents a different view. First, even though its focus is on people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, it shows the indisputable value in its participants and the relative pittance of debt that they owe to society when compared to the immense contributions that they make. Second, it indicates the quality of care required by such individuals on their way to becoming first-generation college

graduates who are educational or social activists. And third, it prescribes specific avenues by which this care can be delivered. In other words, it provides a plan by which society can aid in the development of ultimate citizens simply by paying its debt to children and students. In this section, I discuss five implications that I believe this study has for the education of first-generation college students.

1. Recognize that individuals from low socioeconomic status backgrounds have value and must -- not simply can -- learn.

Low socioeconomic status parents, relatives, and community members, whether literate or not, must be encouraged to serve as pre-mentors and positive namers of children, to provide them with opportunities for ascending cross-class identification, and to award them special status. None of this suggests that children should be encouraged to compete with each other for affection or attention from adults. To the contrary, it is the adults who are challenged to gain the attention of the children, and even one or two adults may be able to provide these services for numbers of children. I grew up in a family of five children all of whom, I now understand, were positively named, pre-mentored, and awarded special status by our uneducated parents. Our parents provided us with opportunities, to the best of their abilities, for what I now recognize as ascending cross-class identification, and they expected that we would all go to college. We all went. A key element in our success was that our parents realized their worth and their role in preparing us to better our lives. They planned the pathway to our future. Other low socioeconomic status adults can learn to do the same.

But a network of parents, schools, and community needs to be established -- different

from the usual parent-teacher association -- which empowers low socioeconomic status parents, grandparents, and others to prepare their children for the academic arena. Worthy national ventures such as the "America Reads" campaign may be excellent templates for advertising, but the problems of illiteracy that they highlight are most often found in the very parents, grandparents, and community members whose help is needed to fight the very ills that are being campaigned against. Instead of being cast as "the problem," undereducated parents and other relatives should be recognized as the large part of the solution that they actually can be or are. Since society has vested in the schools -- especially in the minds of the undereducated -- authority in educational matters, the overture to form a new coalition with their service communities should be made immediately by schools where low socioeconomic status children are part of the student population. A campaign should be mounted which affirms and elicits the contributions that low socioeconomic status adults can make in helping to educate their children in their own homes and on a daily basis.

2. Low socioeconomic status students must be encouraged to develop to their fullest potential.

Low socioeconomic status children must be given the same opportunities that are received by those students whom the school and society value. This is true from the earliest years of schooling through all levels of higher education. Arguments for affirmative action aside, the perception by students that their instructors' attitudes toward and treatment of them are discriminatory detracts from their educational opportunity. In the same vein, when low socioeconomic status and minority students feel devalued by school authority figures such as

teachers and counselors, these students are at risk of abandoning their academic goals. As children, some may cease to aspire and may “mark time” until they are old enough to drop out. Others may continue through high school graduation in educational levels or tracks that do not prepare them either for vocations or for college. Still others may go to college for a short while before dropping out, discouraged and unprepared for the rigors of academic life. Such students often become lost souls whose special purgatory is minimum wage employment, illegal employment, or no employment at all.

While critics may argue that low educational and economic levels of parents correspond with the academic success levels of their children, this study suggests that low socioeconomic status children may often be slow to find success because the schools or other elements crucial to their learning are working against them. As the life stories of many of the first-generation college graduates chronicled in this study document, discrimination and other forms of educational malpractice are all too common in the experiences of low socioeconomic status children. This should not be the case. The seventeen participants in this study make a strong case for how much richer our society could be if the schools gave low socioeconomic status children a fair chance and then observed where the chips fell. Schools, for example, could institute initiatives such as mentoring programs, field trips, fresh air camps, and advisement and counseling services all of which could dramatically enhance the educational experiences of low socioeconomic status and minority students -- many of whom are potential first-generation college graduates.

3. All students should receive proper academic advisement.

The slogan that information is power is nowhere more true than in an educational institution, and many students -- especially low socioeconomic status and minority students -- lack the information needed to plan effectively for college or for a job. As many of this study's participants indicated, advisement information was intentionally withheld from them when they were undergoing the college admissions process. Equally as important as college counseling is the advisement in academic course planning that students need prior to high school. Because low socioeconomic status parents may know little or nothing about academic preparation for college, without advisement from school counselors or teachers, their children may be clueless about which courses they need to take during junior high school if they are to qualify for college preparatory courses in high school. They may not know which academic areas they must master -- and at what levels of proficiency -- if they are to earn competitive scores on college entrance examinations. Students and their parents need access to this information early. Finding out at the last minute, as Theresa did, that the American College Test exists and is required for admission to many colleges could derail the college going plans of many students.

4. The school, the community, the state, and the nation should provide needed support to first-generation college students.

Often the parents, family, neighbors, and friends of first-generation college students aggressively discourage them from pursuing college degrees. Parents, spouses, siblings, and others may be prompted in their lack of support by insecurity about losing loved ones who break with tradition and enroll in college. Whatever their families' rationales for discouraging

them may be, most first-generation college students need practical support, and emotional support is vastly important to their college success. Mentoring programs that provide peer mentors as well as mentors from among the various layers of college employees, including faculty, should be established. The spontaneous mentoring relationships that some faculty develop with their students are invaluable and should be encouraged in addition to any formal mentoring programs that would involve faculty. Both formal and informal mentoring programs can provide ways of helping students to negotiate identity issues during college. In fact, in light of the significance that this study's participants placed upon positive connections between themselves and their professors, faculty should recognize and accept their moral responsibility to mentor first-generation college students and to provide them with opportunities for ascending cross-class identification.

5. Educational institutions at all levels -- from nursery schools through graduate schools -- should set the tone for equality, nondiscrimination, and fair play for everyone.

The message that discrimination is not condoned and will not be tolerated should be iterated and supported at the highest levels of the administration and should be reiterated and supported at every other level within the institution. Such messages begin to allay the fears of first-generation and minority college students that they are going to have to fight -- far above and beyond the efforts of those who "belong" -- discrimination and hardship at every turn. Ray talked about the stance taken by the administration when he took his daughter to undergraduate school at Harvard. In his address to the hundreds of in-coming freshmen and their parents, the dean referred to the racial incidents occurring on many college campuses.

He indicated that such behaviors were not valued and would not be tolerated by the university. "If you do not believe that the atmosphere here is right for you, go home now," he admonished. In spite of having earned a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a doctorate, Ray needed to hear those words from the institution where he would leave his daughter. Neither Ray nor most other parents nor most students require a guarantee from a college that discrimination will not occur. However, it is widely accepted that institutions have collective consciousnesses and that their leaders are the most powerful forces in raising or lowering them.

Recommendations for Further Research

One of the great influences in my life was Florence Rome, an older, black professor at Bethune-Cookman College. She knew Mrs. Bethune -- had been her personal secretary -- and was just the most inspiring, the most helpful person I ever met. When they assigned me to teach the honors course, I was just petrified. We shared a double section. Once she came in and said, "I've just lost them this week." Shocked to hear this from an excellent, experienced teacher, I asked, "What will you do?" She said, "Just keep on trying." I have never forgotten that.

Ken

One problem with replicating the progress made by outstanding individuals is overcoming the perception that they *are* outstanding. Too often we see human exceptionality as beyond the pale of possibility for most people. Thus, we discount patterns and opportunities for progress because we do not believe that they are realizable. While this study attempts to surpass that point, it leaves salient questions unanswered.

First, the study does not address the degree, if any, to which the participants' successes in school, in college, and as activists are attributable to the "*je ne sais quoi*"

(unknown factor) that may simply lie within them as particular and unique individuals. A second, and corollary, question is “How much of their success is due to other extrinsic causes undetected or unexamined by this study?” The question is pertinent for all seventeen of the cases.

Jim provided an intriguing example of the question’s relevance. Upon analysis of the interviews, I found Jim’s independent actions as a child, as an adolescent, and as an adult to be especially interesting among the cases not so much because of their difference from the actions of the other participants in the study but primarily because of the unique foundation of support on which he acted. While the school, the home, and the community were not supportive of Jim in terms of caring human awareness and interaction, the community appears priceless when considered simply as physical environment. Jim described his situation:

I grew up by my own devices, pretty much on my own. My mom and dad sort of let me go. Whatever I did was okay. It was as if they forgot about me. . . and I was able to roam the hillsides with my bow and arrow when I was a kid. . . I loved it because you could see the ocean which was five miles away. I could just be a boy. I don’t think kids in a town . . . can be that way today.

In thinking, after the birth of his son, of his early life of detachment from his parents, Jim stated that he knew that the disconnected way of bringing up a child “couldn’t possibly work.” Yet, in spite of the obviously debilitating effects of aloneness and isolation on children, Jim’s lack of connection to his parents netted him an early discovery of freedom which appears to have influenced everything he has done in life. Other participants’ stories depict humans as their primary aids on their paths toward success. Jim’s foundation appears to have come basically from nature and the freedom that it provided. Further study of Jim’s childhood

circumstances and of similar cases might reveal insights into the role of nature in human resilience and productivity.

Third, it would be worthwhile to study in depth the effects on familial relationships -- especially on parents, spouses, siblings, and children -- when first-generation college students work toward and earn college degrees. While a large number of first-generation college students are recent high school graduates, many are of nontraditional age and have established families of their own before entering college. What are the costs and benefits of college attendance to their family members? The stories of traditional and nontraditional aged first-generation college students should be told in their own words. One benefit of their stories might be illumination of how to further abate the dissonance between the cultures of home and college for many first-generation college students.

Finally, while this study begins to venture down this path, I believe that additional research is needed that further isolates and identifies family, life, and college-going experiences that have had a positive effect on the academic successes of first-generation college graduates and on their decisions to become educational or social activists. The benefits of this group to the nation -- in purely practical terms -- is certainly great, and the efforts which aided in their successful educational development should be replicated time and again. But the first and best reason for aiding those who would become first-generation college graduates is that it is the right thing to do. For them, also, the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right.

APPENDIX A
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Bob (white / male), 44, is an artist who teaches painting, sculpture, and art appreciation courses at a community college. A graduate of a community college himself, Bob went on to earn a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. from Northern Illinois University. He was born in Chicago and grew up in the Chicago suburbs.

Carmen (Hispanic / female), 29, is a business advisor for a not-for-profit organization in Chicago, Illinois. She earned her B.A. from DePaul University in Chicago.

Diane (black / female), 39, teaches English and creative writing at a community college. She earned both her B.A. and her M.A. from Columbia College in Chicago.

Florence (Native-American / female), 60, from Ontario, Canada, is a storyteller and social activist in Chicago, Illinois. Florence earned her B.A. from N.A.E.S. College in Chicago.

Gaoke (Asian / male), 45, is a native of Chiang Zhia Go, a village in China. He teaches composition and Chinese at a community college in northeastern Illinois. His B.A. degree is from the Xian University of Foreign Studies. His M.A. is from Bowling Green University. He is completing a doctorate at Illinois State University.

Hycel (black / male), 60, is Senior Pastor at a large Baptist Church in Evanston, Illinois. He holds a B.F.A. from Kent State University and an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. He was born and reared in Columbus, Ohio.

Jack (white / male), 74, a native Chicagoan, owns an engineering company. A graduate in engineering of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Jack has continued his formal education by taking courses from five colleges.

Jim (white / male), 52, is an artist who grew up in California. He attended Berkeley during the 1960s. His B.A. is from San Diego State University.

Ken (white / male), 58, a native of New York, teaches philosophy and humanities at a community college. His B.A. is from William and Mary. His M.A. is from the University of Colorado.

Lula (black / female), 74, earned her B.A. from Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina. She was employed for many years by the Macy's Credit Union in New York City. She is a volunteer at Penn Cultural Center on her native St. Helena Island, off the coast of South Carolina.

Larry (black / male), 47, who is a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, has a B.A. from the University of Michigan and a J.D. from Georgetown University. Larry is an attorney with a

nationally known law firm in Washington, D.C.

Mary (black / female), 49, a native of Luvern, Alabama, teaches fourth grade at an elementary school in Waukegan, Illinois. She holds a B.A. from Tuskegee Institute and an M.A. from Northeastern Illinois University.

Michael (Hispanic / male), 28, a Chicagoan, is Executive Director of a not-for-profit organization in Chicago, Illinois. Michael has a B.A. from Yale University and an M.B.A. from the University of Illinois Chicago.

Nancy (white / female), 63, a Chicagoan, is a humanities professor at a community college in Chicago. Her B.A. and M.A. degrees are from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Her Ph.D. is from Northern Illinois University.

Ray (Hispanic / male), 52, born and raised in New York City, has a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, an M.A. from Northeastern Illinois University, an M.A. from Roosevelt University, and an Ed.D. from Loyola University Chicago. Ray is principal of an elementary school.

Theresa (white / female), 29, who grew up in a Chicago suburb, teaches Spanish at a community college. She earned an A.A. degree from the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois, and both B.A. and M.A. degrees from Southern Illinois University.

Velma (black / female), 41, a native of Glouster, Mississippi, holds a B.A. from Alcorn State University, an M.A. from Bowling Green State University, and a Ph.D. from Howard University. Velma teaches English and communications at a historically black college in North Carolina.

APPENDIX B
PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommend, I will use open-ended questions to organize data collection for this qualitative study. The following questions are organized around the three research questions that will guide the study. They will frame the interview sessions with each subject.

Category #1: Motivation to attend College - What family and life experiences contribute to the matriculation and subsequent educational success of low socioeconomic status first-generation college students?

1. Describe your background and the educational attainments of your parents and other family members.
2. What life experiences motivated you to go to college? What role did your family play in your desire to go to college?
3. Were there significant individuals in your life who influenced you to go to college?
4. Were there any individuals whose lives you regarded as models or goals for your emulation?

Category #2: The College Experience - What college-specific experiences -- both in- and out-of class -- contribute to the educational success of low socioeconomic status first generation college students?

1. What were the struggles that you had to face to get to college and to persist once you were there?
2. How did you overcome these hardships? What helped you to keep going? Comment on all aspects of your life that helped in your ability to persist.
3. Describe the positive and negative aspects of your collegiate experience.
4. What was your major in college? Why did you choose it? How does it relate to your occupation or to your other interests?
5. Where did the "real learning" take place for you in college? Describe a really powerful learning experience that you had in college. What was powerful about it? How did it affect you?

Category #3: Effects of the Degree - How do the various experiences previously described affect students' growth and development in college (i.e., in terms of attitudinal, values, and skills development)? What imprint do these experiences make on students' decisions to become educational or social activists? How do they affect the ways in which these first-generation college graduates live their lives and affect others as agents of change?

1. How would you describe your role as an educated person?
2. How has earning a college degree influenced the events of your personal life?
Your professional life?
3. How has earning a college degree influenced your effect on others?
4. How have you changed as a result of college?
5. How have you changed the lives of others?
6. In retrospect, do you think that the effort to earn a college degree has been worth the costs?
7. What have been some of the most satisfying events of your professional life?
Your personal life?
8. What are your goals for the future?

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VITA

A native of North Carolina, I attended public schools there through twelfth grade. I received a bachelor's degree in English from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, after having spent my third year of college as a "Guest Junior" at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

I hold master's degrees in literature and in administration and supervision from Northeastern Illinois University and Roosevelt University, respectively. I have taught English at the junior high, high school, and community college levels and have been both a high school and a community college administrator. I am currently Associate Dean of Communication Arts, Humanities, and Fine Arts at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Sandria D. Rodriguez has been read and approved by the following committee:

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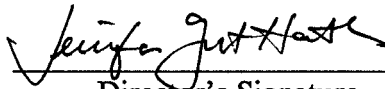
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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of philosophy.

October 23, 1997

Date



Director's Signature